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ROUMANIAN STORIES

ROUMANIAN STORIES TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINAL ROUMANIAN

BY LUCY BYNG

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TO

ROUMANIA'S GRACIOUS QUEEN

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED WITH

PROFOUND ADMIRATION AND RESPECT

PREFACE

VERY little is known in England about Roumanian literature, which although not as rich as in many other countries, presents, nevertheless, features of real interest.

Like all people in touch with the East, even the peasants have a strain of poetry in their speech, their expression is picturesque and gentle, an almost fatalistic note of sadness rings through all the songs they sing.

Our poets have adapted themselves to this particular strain, and mostly it is the popular form that has been developed by our literary men both in prose and poetry.

Roumanian literature possesses eminent historians and critics. I am not, in these few lines, going to touch upon their activities ; but strangely enough there are few writers of fiction amongst the Roumanians—great novel writers do not exist.

The Roumanian, above all, excels as poet and as a short-story writer. In this last art he is past-master, and it is therefore a great pleasure to me to encourage this book which Mrs. Schomberg Byng

is sending out into the world at a moment when I am so anxious that my country should be better known and understood in England.

Each one of these short stories is a little work of art, and deeply characteristic of Roumanian popular life and thought; therefore I have no doubt that they will interest all those who care about literature.

I feel personally indebted to Mrs. Schomberg Byng to have thought of making this interesting feature of Roumanian literature known to the British public. I therefore, with all my heart, wish this little volume Good Luck.

MARIE.

Jan., 1920.

PREFACE

BY PROFESSOR S. MEHEDINTZI

Of Bucharest University and
the Roumanian Academy

AS regards poetry Roumanian literature had reached the European level by the nineteenth century. Eminescu may be placed by the side of Leopardi. The drama and the novel are still unrepresented by any works of the first rank; but the short story shows that Roumanian writing is constantly on the upward grade.

The following stories have been selected from many writers. The reader must judge each author for himself. It is impossible to settle their respective merits; that would presuppose an acquaintance with the whole of Roumanian literature. We may, however, be allowed to say a word or two about each writer.

Negruzzi is to Roumanian very much what Sir Walter Scott has been to English literature. After the lapse of nigh a century the historical novel is still identified with his name.

Creanga is a production exclusively Roumanian;

a peasant who knew no foreign tongue, but whose mind was steeped in the fairy tales, proverbs, and wit of the people. He wrote with a humour and an originality of imagery which make his work almost impossible to translate into other languages.

Caragiale, our most noted dramatic author, is the antithesis of Creanga ; a man of culture, literary and artistic in the highest sense of the word. *The Easter Torch* ranks him high among the great short-story writers.

Popovici-Banatzeanu—dead very young—and Bratescu-Voineshti are writers who more than any others give us the atmosphere of the English novel in which the ethical note predominates. Some of their pages have the poignancy of Dickens.

The same discreet note is struck by Slavici, born in Hungary, whose *Popa Tanda* is the personification of the Roumanian people subject for centuries to the injustice of an alien race, and driven to seek support in their own work only.

Delavrancea, a famous orator, is a romantic ; while Sadoveanu, the most fertile prose writer among the younger men, possesses as novelist and story-teller a touch which makes him akin to Turgenev and Sienkiewicz.

Beza stands by himself. From the mountains of Macedonia he brings into the national literature

the original note of the life of the shepherds in the Balkans. Constantly upon the road, among mountain tops and plains, always in fear of the foreigners among whom they pass, their life manifests a great spiritual concentration. Over Beza's work there hover a mystery and a restraint which completely fascinate the reader. Though young, he possesses the qualities of the classical writers.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

I WISH to take this opportunity of thanking M. Beza for his most valuable assistance. Without his intimate knowledge of the two languages and his kindly and expert criticism these translations would never have seen the light.

Some well-known names, that of Diuliu Zamfirescu for instance, are absent from my list of authors ; lack of time and difficulty in obtaining their works made their inclusion impossible.

LUCY BYNG.

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ROUMANIAN STORIES

ROUMANIAN STORIES

THE FAIRY OF THE LAKE

By M. Sadoveanu

ONE evening old Costescu told us an adventure of his youth.

The old mill of Zavu, he began, stands to this day close to the Popricani lake. A black building leaning towards the dark waters. The six wheels are driven by great streams of water which come rushing through the mill-race, and surround the house, washing through the cracks. Above the boiling foam which encircles it, the great building shakes with the unceasing roar of the water.

So it is to-day; so it was at the period when I used to roam about those parts—it is long, long, since then.

I remember a night like a night in a fairy tale, full of the silver light of the moon, a night when only youth could see, when only youth could feel.

It was in July. I was descending the lake by

myself with my gun over my shoulder. Flights of duck passing above the forest of reeds lured me on. I followed their rapid flight through the clear atmosphere, the black specks became gradually smaller until they were lost to sight in the rosy clouds of the setting sun. I passed above the weir, where the waterfall brawls, between the bushy willow-trees which guard the narrow path, and approached the mill. The green stream swept through the mill-race, the foaming water boiled round the black building, and in the yard, unyoked and ruminating, the oxen slept beside the waggon.

The old man, the miller, the great-grandson of Zavu, descended from the mill bridge with his pipe in the corner of his mouth. In the deafening roar of the water and the creaking of the wheels men waited in silence amid the luminous spray that filled the old building.

"Good health to you, my old friend Simione!"

"Thank you, sir. How goes it with the land? Grinding good flour?"

This was the old man's usual question: was the country grinding good flour?

"Good, my old friend Simione!"

"Praise be to God!" said the old fellow. "But how are you, sir? You never come to see us. The duck give you no peace!"

"No, they give me no peace. I mean to lie in wait on the bank to-night. Perhaps luck will come my way."

"Good ; may it be as you wish. See, Zamfira will show you the way."

Just at that moment appeared the miller's niece. She was a strange girl of sixteen years of age ; of middle height and thin, but with well-developed muscles : her cheeks were sunburnt, and she had two grey eyes, eyes so restless and so strange, and of such beauty and such brilliance as I have never seen since. She had not regular features, but the grey eyes beneath the heavy, arched brows gave her an unusual and radiant beauty.

At the old man's words she stopped suddenly, and said quickly with twinkling eyes :

"I don't want to show him the way ! "

"Why not ? " I asked with surprise, while the old man smiled.

"Because I don't want to ! " said Zamfira, looking at me askance.

"Very well," said the old man quietly, "don't take him ! "

The girl looked at me searchingly, through half-closed eyelids, and then cried sharply :

"I'll take him, after all ! "

Old Simione began to laugh softly, turned round, and pursued his way to the mill bridge, but Zamfira remained in front of me, erect, her hands by her sides. Her head was bent down, but the grey eyes flashed at me from beneath the eyebrows. Her head was bare, her chestnut hair was drawn smoothly back from the temples into a thick plait,

tied at the nape of the neck; a white water-lily, beautiful, as though cut out of silver, was fastened among her rich tresses. Beneath a white chemise her bosom rose and fell, a blue skirt fell plainly to her ankles.

Suddenly she raised her head and looked shyly at me as she smiled. Her teeth shone between her thin lips. Then, with her eyes, she gave me the signal: "Come!"

I followed her. She moved swiftly; her well-developed form was clearly outlined beneath her thin garments. From time to time she turned her head, and her teeth flashed. She untied the boat, jumped in and said curtly:

"Follow me!"

After I was seated, she braced herself for the effort, thrust in the long pole, and set the boat in motion. For some time we glided through reeds and rushes, and above great beds of weed. When we reached open water she put down the pole, and took to the oars. The boat cleft the deep water which glowed with flames from the fire of the setting sun. The oars splashed softly with a musical sound. The girl's whole body moved with a rhythmic grace that was unspeakably fascinating. The silver lily quivered in the luxuriant chestnut hair.

Silence reigned over the lake. Water-lilies shone in the golden sunset; the reeds rustled softly; the dragon-flies passed like blue flashes through the light.

Suddenly the girl turned her strange grey eyes upon me.

"So to-night you will lie in wait for the duck?" she asked.

"Yes, I shall wait."

"Good."

Her voice had a melodious, silvery ring. I questioned her:

"That seems strange to you?"

"No," she said, turning her head away; "but aren't you afraid?"

"Of what should I be afraid?"

"Of the fairy of the lake," she replied with conviction.

"Of the water lady? Who is this fairy of the lake?"

"What? Do you not know? The fairy of the lake."

Her eyes scanned my face intently.

The sun had nearly set; the water of the lake grew dark; a heron passed above us scarcely moving its wings; its cries sent a shudder of sadness through the silence of the forest of reeds. The girl looked at me, and her teeth shone with a smile of almost diabolical beauty: her clear-cut face seemed to reflect the colour of the green water. I cannot describe what I felt; only the *charm* of the speaker was astounding. In that framework of reeds and creepers—set as it were between two skies—*she* was the fairy of the lake.

The boat struck the side of a cave and remained fast.

"Here we are," said the girl.

Slowly I stepped ashore. But the charm made my head reel. I turned abruptly, took her face between my hands, and would have kissed those eyes in whose depths the secret of the lake lay hid. She resisted gracefully with little movements, and trills of laughter, and instead of kissing her eyes I touched her lips which burnt like fire.

I felt her draw herself away, I felt those strange eyes piercing through me, and the boat shot away into the reeds and creepers. The lake remained desolate, and in the silence only the gentle splash of distant oars could be heard. I prepared myself a little bed of reeds in the cave. I spread out my serge cloak, tried the triggers of my gun, and while I waited for the duck I fell into a brown study. How strange! I was perfectly conscious of my position; I knew quite well that the fairy was none other than Zamfira, the miller's niece, the sunburnt, and perhaps, the simple maiden; and in spite of this, the eyes, and the laughter, had something about them that intoxicated me like the strong perfume of some wild flower.

In the gradually deepening shadows of the twilight she remained like some vision, floating on the bosom of the lake, among the blossoms of the water-lilies. I was roused by the rapid whirr of wings. I started up. A flight of duck passed

over me. This event drove away my preoccupation. I steadied the gun in my hands and put it at full cock. In the reeds, torn and beaten by the wings of the duck, coot and moor-hens called to each other; a light breeze ruffled the forest of reeds. Small flocks of birds passed through the darkness of the night. I fired a few shots. The gun made a deep sound which echoed far across the water; one or two duck detached themselves from the group, and fell heavily to the surface of the lake, troubling the water. The darkness increased, it was impossible to distinguish the duck, one could only hear the rustle of their flight, like a brief wind. The evening breeze dropped, and a calm spread itself over the lake: only great black birds flew overhead, noisily crying: "Chaw! Chaw!" From time to time, in the silence of the night, could be heard the deep, lugubrious, indistinct note of the bittern.

Stars glowed overhead, and in the depths of the water—the moon would not rise for nearly another hour. I wrapped myself in my cloak, and began to ponder over those grey eyes. In the silence, which grew ever deeper, the noise of the mill and of the weir could be heard afar off; somewhere a dog barked in its kennel; from some hill, lighting the darkness, one caught the twinkle of a bright flame. The supple body, the eyes, and the laughter, the lily blossom which harmonized so well with the lake and with the green lights in the eyes, tantalized me. Now she was no longer the simple maiden, kissed

by the sun and caressed by the wind ; every movement, every look, had something particular about it. And also something strange.

I had never seen her when I visited the mill. I had heard of the old man's devilish niece, but I had never set eyes upon her. But now an incident recurred to my mind, to which, at the time, I had paid scant attention. On one occasion I had perceived a pair of restless eyes peeping at me through a chink in the mill bridge. Those eyes were surely hers ; they sparkled so—and were so full of light and mirth. There, in the dark night, that ardent kiss seemed to burn me and I waited—I waited for something that I could not explain even to myself.

I dozed, dreaming of those grey eyes. I cannot tell—perhaps I fell asleep. I awoke in the full light of the moon which was flooding atmosphere and lake with its silver beams. The water glittered, the night was still, the mill was silent ; in the distance the weir was murmuring as in a dream.

Here and there, the water rippled into circles the colour of agate ; groups of duck were bathing in the moonlight. I put my hand to my gun. I raised my eyes, I was ready to pull—when I paused. A melodious song, scarcely intelligible, could be heard coming from the lake. It was a simple song, and monotonous, but its remoteness, the echo across the water, the clear light of the moon, lent it a profound charm. I immediately thought of the lady of the lake.

I placed my gun beside me and listened. It was a simple and touching melody. It had ceased for some time, but I still strained my ears ; I could only catch the soft murmur of the distant weir. Time passed, and yet I still expected something to happen.

After a while I heard distinctly the soft splash of oars. I looked everywhere, I could not make out whence it came. Then, suddenly, amid the obscurity of the rushes, the gently floating boat came gliding into the sea of light with the girl reclining in the silvery beams. The lily shone in her dark hair.

I cannot tell you what I felt, for the storm of emotion cannot be expressed in words, and besides that, I was young then, and half a century has passed since my youth. I know I stood with wondering eyes and gazed like one possessed : in very truth this was the fairy of the lake !

All at once I saw a movement. The boat turned, and the oars struck the water, making great ripples of light. It was directed towards my cave. She came with wild speed, staring, her great eyes like phosphorescent stars. But when she got near, she once more let the boat glide, then turned abruptly, and laughing passed by the cave—a silvery laugh, which I have never forgotten, no, not to this day although it is so long ago. She passed by like a phantom, laughing, and her eyes shining like two stars in the night of those great eyebrows. To the right of me she rose, and threw something towards

me; then, sinking down, she again took the oars, struck the water, and shot out into the open lake.

She disappeared. One could only hear the soft stroke of the oars; then that, too, ceased, and perfect silence fell upon the silvery lake.

By my side I found a bouquet of carnations and sweet basil, the flowers of love.

At daybreak the old man came to take me off. When I turned towards the yard I once again bent my head in the direction of the old black building. Eyes watched me through the chink in the mill bridge.

That very day I went away. Many a time have I wanted to return to the old Zavu mill, but fate has willed it otherwise. At last, when I could have done so, other loves have held me in other places. Years have passed, but the bunch of dried carnations and basil reminds me of it all. And from time to time, my thoughts wander to the fairy of the lake.

THE EASTER TORCH

By I. L. Caragiale

LEIBA ZIBAL, mine host of Podeni, was sitting lost in thought, by a table placed in the shadow in front of the inn; he was awaiting the arrival of the coach which should have come some time ago; it was already an hour behind time.

The story of Zibal's life is a long and cheerless one: when he is taken with one of his feverish attacks it is a diversion for him to analyse one by one the most important events in that life.

Huckster, seller of hardware, jobber, between whiles even rougher work perhaps, seller of old clothes, then tailor, and boot-black in a dingy alley in Jassy; all this had happened to him since the accident whereby he lost his situation as office boy in a big wine-shop. Two porters were carrying a barrel down to a cellar under the supervision of the lad Zibal. A difference arose between them as to the division of their earnings. One of them seized a piece of wood that lay at hand and struck his comrade on the forehead, who fell to the

ground covered in blood. At the sight of the wild deed the boy gave a cry of alarm, but the wretch hurried through the yard, and in passing gave the lad a blow. Zibal fell to the ground fainting with fear. After several months in bed he returned to his master, only to find his place filled up. Then began a hard struggle for existence, which increased in difficulty after his marriage with Sura. Their hard lot was borne with patience. Sura's brother, the inn-keeper of Podeni, died ; the inn passed into Zibal's hands, and he carried on the business on his own account.

Here he had been for the last five years. He had saved a good bit of money and collected good wine—a commodity that will always be worth good money—Leiba had escaped from poverty, but they were all three sickly, himself, his wife, and his child, all victims of malaria, and men are rough and quarrelsome in Podeni—slanderous, scoffers, revilers, accused of vitriol throwing. And the threats ! A threat is very terrible to a character that bends easily beneath every blow. The thought of a threat worked more upon Leiba's nerves than did his attacks of fever.

" Oh, wretched Gentile ! " he thought, sighing.

This " wretched " referred to Gheorghe—wherever he might be !—a man between whom and himself a most unpleasant affair had arisen.

Gheorghe came to the inn one autumn morning, tired with his walk ; he was just out of hospital—

so he said—and was looking for work. The innkeeper took him into his service. But Gheorghe showed himself to be a brutal and a sullen man. He swore continually, and muttered to himself alone in the yard. He was a bad servant, lazy and insolent, and he stole. He threatened his mistress one day when she was pregnant, cursing her, and striking her on the stomach. Another time he set a dog on little Strul.

Leiba paid him his wages at once, and dismissed him. But Gheorghe would not go: he asserted with violence that he had been engaged for a year. Then the innkeeper sent to the town hall to get guards to remove him.

Gheorghe put his hand swiftly to his breast, crying:

"Jew!" and began to rail at his master. Unfortunately, a cart full of customers arrived at that moment. Gheorghe began to grin, saying: "What frightened you, Master Leiba? Look, I am going now." Then bending fiercely over the bar towards Leiba, who drew back as far as possible, he whispered: "Expect me on Easter Eve; we'll crack red eggs together, Jew! You will know then what I have done to you, and I will answer for it."

Just then, customers entered the inn.

"May we meet in good health at Easter, Master Leiba!" added Gheorghe as he left.

. . . . .

Leiba went to the town hall, then to the sub-

prefecture to denounce the threatener, begging that he might be watched. The sub-prefect was a lively young man; he first accepted Leiba's humble offering, then he began to laugh at the timid Jew, and make fun of him. Leiba tried hard to make him realize the gravity of the situation, and pointed out how isolated the house stood from the village, and even from the high road. But the sub-prefect, with a more serious air, advised him to be prudent; he must not mention such things, for, truly, it would arouse the desire to do them in a village where men were rough and poor, ready to break the law.

A few days later, an official with two riders came to see him about Gheorghe; he was "wanted" for some crime.

If only Leiba had been able to put up with him until the arrival of these men! In the meanwhile, no one knew the whereabouts of Gheorghe. Although this had happened some time ago, Gheorghe's appearance, the movement as though he would have drawn something from his breast, and the threatening words had all remained deeply impressed upon the mind of the terror-stricken man. How was it that that memory remained so clear?

It was Easter Eve.

From the top of the hill, from the village lying among the lakes about two miles away, came the sound of church bells. One hears in a strange way

when one is feverish, now so loud, now so far away. The coming night was the night before Easter, the night of the fulfilment of Gheorghe's promise.

"But perhaps they have caught him by now!"

Moreover, Zibal only means to stay at Podeni till next quarter-day. With his capital he could open a good business in Jassy. In a town, Leiba would regain his health, he would go near the police station—he could treat the police, the commissionaires, the sergeants. Who pays well gets well guarded.

In a large village, the night brings noise and light, not darkness and silence as in the isolated valley of Podeni. There is an inn in Jassy—there in the corner, just the place for a shop! An inn where girls sing all night long, a Café Chantant. What a gay and rousing life! There, at all hours of the day and night, officials and their girls, and other dirty Christians will need entertainment.

What is the use of bothering oneself here where business keeps falling off, especially since the coming of the railway which only skirts the marshes at some distance?

"Leiba," calls Sura from within, "the coach is coming, one can hear the bells."

The Podeni valley is a ravine enclosed on all sides by wooded hills. In a hollow towards the south lie several deep pools caused by the springs which rise in the hills; above them lie some stretches of ground covered with bushes and rushes.

Leiba's hotel stands in the centre of the valley, between the pools and the more elevated ground to the north ; it is an old stone building, strong as a small fortress : although the ground is marshy, the walls and cellars are very dry.

At Sura's voice Leiba raises himself painfully from his chair, stretching his tired limbs ; he takes a long look towards the east, not a sign of the diligence.

"It is not coming ; you imagined it," he replied to his wife, and sat down again.

Very tired the man crossed his arms on the table, and laid his head upon them, for it was burning. The warmth of the spring sun began to strike the surface of the marshes and a pleasant lassitude enveloped his nerves, and his thoughts began to run riot as a sick man's will, gradually taking on strange forms and colours.

Gheorghe—Easter Eve—burglars—Jassy—the inn in the centre of the town—a gay restaurant doing well—restored health.

And he dozed.

Sura and the child went without a great deal up here.

Leiba went to the door of the inn and looked out on to the road.

On the main road there was a good deal of traffic, an unceasing noise of wheels accompanied by the rhythmic sound of horses' hooves trotting upon the smooth asphalt.

But suddenly the traffic stopped, and from Copou a group of people could be seen approaching, gesticulating and shouting excitedly.

The crowd appeared to be escorting somebody: soldiers, a guard and various members of the public. Curious onlookers appeared at every door of the inn.

"Ah," thought Leiba, "they have laid hands on a thief."

The procession drew nearer. Sura detached herself from the others, and joined Leiba on the steps of the inn.

"What is it, Sura?" he asked.

"A madman escaped from Golia."

"Let us close the inn so that he cannot get at us."

"He is bound now, but just now he escaped. He fought with all the soldiers. A rough Gentile in the crowd pushed a Jew against the madman and he bit him on the cheek."

Leiba could see well from the steps; from the stair below Sura watched with the child in her arms.

It was, in fact, a violent lunatic held on either side by two men: his wrists were tightly bound over each other by a thick cord. He was a man of gigantic stature with a head like a bull, thick black hair, and hard, grizzled beard and whiskers. Through his shirt, which had been torn in the struggle, his broad chest was visible, covered like his head, with a mass of hair. His feet were bare;

his mouth was full of blood, and he continually spat out hair which he had bitten from the Jew's beard.

Every one stood still. Why? The guards unbound the lunatic's hands. The crowd drew to one side, leaving a large space around him. The madman looked about him, and his fierce glance rested upon Zibal's doorway; he gnashed his teeth, made a dash for the three steps, and in a flash, seizing the child's head in his right hand and Sura's in his left, he knocked them together with such force that they cracked like so many fresh eggs. A sound was heard, a scrunching impossible to describe, as the two skulls cracked together.

Leiba, with bursting heart, like a man who falls from an immense height, tried to cry out: "The whole world abandons me to the tender mercies of a madman!" But his voice refused to obey him.

"Get up, Jew!" cried some one, beating loudly upon the table with a stick.

"It's a bad joke," said Sura from the doorway of the inn, "thus to frighten the man out of his sleep, you stupid peasant!"

"What has scared you, Jew?" asked the wag, laughing. "You sleep in the afternoon, eh? Get up, customers are coming, the mail coach is arriving."

And, according to his silly habit which greatly irritated the Jew, he tried to take his arm and tickle him.

"Let me alone!" cried the innkeeper, drawing

back and pushing him away with all his might. "Can you not see that I am ill? Leave me in peace."

The coach arrived at last, nearly three hours late. There were two passengers who seated themselves together with the driver, whom they had invited to share their table.

The conversation of the travellers threw a light upon recent events. At the highest posting station, a robbery with murder had been committed during the night in the inn of a Jew. The murdered innkeeper should have provided change of horses. The thieves had taken them, and while other horses were being found in the village the curious travellers could examine the scene of the crime at their leisure. Five victims! But the details! From just seeing the ruined house one could believe it to have been some cruel vendetta or the work of some religious fanatic. In stories of sectarian fanaticism one heard occasionally of such extravagant crimes.

Leiba shook with a violent access of fever and listened aghast.

What followed must have undoubtedly filled the driver with respect. The young passengers were two students, one of philosophy, the other of medicine; they were returning to amuse themselves in their native town. They embarked upon a violent academic discussion upon crime and its causes, and, to give him his due, the medical student was better informed than the philosopher.

Atavism ; alcoholism and its pathological consequences ; defective birth ; deformity ; Paludism ; then nervous disorders ! Such and such conquest of modern science—but the case of reversion to type ! Darwin, Häckel, Lombroso. At the case of reversion to type, the driver opened wide his eyes in which shone a profound admiration for the conquests of modern science.

"It is obvious," added the medical student. "The so-called criminal proper, taken as a type, has unusually long arms, and very short feet, a flat and narrow forehead, and a much developed occiput. To the experienced eye his face is characteristically coarse and bestial ; he is rudimentary man : he is, as I say, a beast which has but lately got used to standing on its hind legs only, and to raising its head towards the sky, towards the light."

At the age of twenty, after so much excitement, and after a good repast with wine so well vinted, and so well matured as Leiba's, a phrase with a lyrical touch came well even from a medical student.

Between his studies of Darwin and Lombroso, the enthusiastic youth had found time to imbibe a little Schopenhauer—"towards the sky, towards the light !"

Leiba was far from understanding these "illuminating" ideas. Perhaps for the first time did such grand words and fine subtleties of thought find expression in the damp atmosphere of Podeni.

But that which he understood better than anything, much better even than the speaker, was the striking illustration of the theory: the case of reversion to type he knew in flesh and blood, it was the portrait of Gheorghe. This portrait, which had just been drawn in broad outline only, he could fill in perfectly in his own mind, down to the most minute details.

. . . . .

The coach had gone. Leiba followed it with his eyes until, turning to the left, it was lost to sight round the hill. The sun was setting behind the ridge to the west, and the twilight began to weave soft shapes in the Podeni valley.

The gloomy innkeeper began to turn over in his mind all that he had heard. In the dead of night, lost in the darkness, a man, two women and two young children, torn without warning from the gentle arms of sleep by the hands of beasts with human faces, and sacrificed one after the other, the agonized cries of the children cut short by the dagger ripping open their bodies, the neck slashed with a hatchet, the dull rattle in the throat with each gush of blood through the wound; and the last victim, half-distraught, in a corner, witness of the scene, and awaiting his turn. A condition far worse than execution was that of the Jew without protection in the hands of the Gentile—skulls too fragile for such fierce hands as those of the madman just now.

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Leiba's lips, parched with fever, trembled as they mechanically followed his thoughts. A violent shivering fit seized him ; he entered the porch of the inn with tottering steps.

"There is no doubt," thought Sura, "Leiba is not at all well, he is really ill ; Leiba has got 'ideas' into his head. Is not that easy to understand after all he has been doing these last days, and especially after what he has done to-day ?"

He had had the inn closed before the lights were lit, to remain so until the Sabbath was ended. Three times had some customers knocked at the door, calling to him, in familiar voices, to undo it. He had trembled at each knock and had stood still, whispering softly and with terrified eyes :

"Do not move—I want no Gentiles here."

Then he had passed under the portico, and had listened at the top of the stone steps by the door which was secured with a bar of wood. He shook so that he could scarcely stand, but he would not rest. The most distressing thing of all was that, he had answered Sura's persistent questions sharply, and had sent her to bed, ordering her to put out the light at once. She had protested meanwhile, but the man had repeated the order curtly enough, and she had had unwillingly to submit, resigning herself to postponing to a later date any explanation of his conduct.

Sura had put out the lamp, had gone to bed, and now slept by the side of Strul.

The woman was right. Leiba was really ill.

. . . . .

Night had fallen. For a long time Leiba had been sitting, listening by the doorway which gave on to the passage.

What is that?

Indistinct sounds came from the distance—horses trotting, the noise of heavy blows, mysterious and agitated conversations. The effort of listening intently in the solitude of the night sharpens the sense of hearing: when the eye is disarmed and powerless, the ear seems to struggle to assert its power.

But it was not imagination. From the road leading hither from the main road came the sound of approaching horses. Leiba rose, and tried to get nearer to the big door in the passage. The door was firmly shut by a heavy bar of wood across it, the ends of which ran into holes in the wall. At his first step the sand scrunching under his slippers made an indiscreet noise. He drew his feet from his slippers, and waited in the corner. Then, without a sound that could be heard by an unexpectant ear, he went to the door in the corridor, just as the riders passed in front of it at walking pace. They were speaking very low to each other, but not so low but that Leiba could quite well catch these words:

"He has gone to bed early."

"Supposing he has gone away?"

"His turn will come; but I should have liked——"

No more was intelligible; the men were already some way away.

To whom did these words refer? Who had gone to bed or gone away? Whose turn would come another time? Who would have liked something? And what was it he wanted? What did they want on that by-road—a road only used by anyone wishing to find the inn?

An overwhelming sense of fatigue seemed to overcome Leiba.

"Could it be Gheorghe?"

Leiba felt as if his strength was giving way, and he sat down by the door. Eager thoughts chased each other through his head, he could not think clearly or come to any decision.

Terrified, he re-entered the inn, struck a match, and lighted a small petroleum lamp.

It was an apology for a light; the wick was turned so low as to conceal the flame in the brass receiver; only by means of the opening round the receiver could some of the vertical shafts of light penetrate into a gloom that was like the darkness of death—all the same it was sufficient to enable him to see well into the familiar corners of the inn. Ah! How much less is the difference between the sun and the tiniest spark of light than between the latter and the gloom of blindness.

The clock on the wall ticked audibly. The

monotonous sound irritated Leiba. He put his hand over the swinging pendulum, and stayed its movement.

His throat was parched. He was thirsty. He washed a small glass in a three-legged tub by the side of the bar and tried to pour some good brandy out of a decanter ; but the mouth of the decanter began to clink loudly on the edge of the glass. This noise was still more irritating. A second attempt, in spite of his effort to conquer his weakness, met with no greater success.

Then, giving up the idea of the glass, he let it fall gently into the water, and drank several times out of the decanter. After that he pushed the decanter back into its place ; as it touched the shelf it made an alarming clatter. For a moment he waited, appalled by such a catastrophe. Then he took the lamp, and placed it in the niche of the window which lighted the passage : the door, the pavement, and the wall which ran at right angles to the passage, were illuminated by almost imperceptible streaks of light.

He seated himself near the doorway and listened intently.

From the hill came the sound of bells ringing in the Resurrection morning. It meant that midnight was past, day was approaching. Ah ! If only the rest of this long night might pass as had the first half !

The sound of sand trodden underfoot ! But he

was sitting in the corner, and had not stirred; a second noise, followed by many such. There could be no doubt some one was outside, here, quite near. Leiba rose, pressing his hand to his heart, and trying to swallow a suspicious lump in his throat.

There were several people outside—and Gheorghe! Yes, he was there; yes, the bells on the hill had rung the Resurrection.

They spoke softly:

"I tell you he is asleep. I saw when the lights went out."

"Good, we will take the whole nest."

"I will undo the door, I understand how it works. We must cut an opening—the beam runs along here."

He seemed to feel the touch of the men outside as they measured the distance on the wood. A big gimlet could be heard boring its way through the dry bark of the old oak. Leiba felt the need of support; he steadied himself against the door with his left hand while he covered his eyes with the right.

Then, through some inexplicable play of the senses, he heard, from within, quite loud and clear:

"Leiba! Here comes the coach."

It was surely Sura's voice. A warm ray of hope! A moment of joy! It was just another dream! But Leiba drew his left hand quickly back; the point of the tool, piercing the wood at that spot, had pricked the palm of his hand.

Was there any chance of escape? Absurd! In his burning brain the image of the gimlet took inconceivable dimensions. The instrument, turning continually, grew indefinitely, and the opening became larger and larger, large enough at last to enable the monster to step through the round aperture without having to bend. All that surged through such a brain transcends the thoughts of man; life rose to such a pitch of exaltation that everything seen, heard, felt, appeared to be enormous, the sense of proportion became chaotic.

The work outside was continued with method and perseverance. Four times in succession Leiba had seen the sharp steel tooth pierce through to his side and draw back again.

"Now, give me the saw," said Gheorghe.

The narrow end of a saw appeared through the first hole, and started to work with quick, regular movements. The plan was easy to understand; four holes in four corners of one panel; the saw made cuts between them; the gimlet was driven well home in the centre of the panel; when the piece became totally separated from the main body of the wood it was pulled out; through the opening thus made a strong hand inserted itself, seized the bar, pushed it to one side and—Gentiles are in Leiba's house.

In a few moments, this same gimlet would cause the destruction of Leiba and his domestic hearth. The two executioners would hold the victim

prostrate on the ground, and Gheorghe, with heel upon his body, would slowly bore the gimlet into the bone of the living breast as he had done into the dead wood, deeper and deeper, till it reached the heart, silencing its wild beatings and pinning it to the spot.

Leiba broke into a cold sweat; the man was overcome by his own imagination, and sank softly to his knees as though life were ebbing from him under the weight of this last horror, overwhelmed by the thought that he must abandon now all hope of saving himself.

"Yes! Pinned to the spot," he said, despairingly. "Yes! Pinned to the spot."

He stayed a moment, staring at the light by the window. For some moments he stood aghast, as though in some other world, then he repeated with quivering eyelids:

"Yes! Pinned to the spot."

Suddenly a strange change took place in him, a complete revulsion of feeling; he ceased to tremble, his despair disappeared, and his face, so discomposed by the prolonged crisis, assumed an air of strange serenity. He straightened himself with the decision of a strong and healthy man who makes for an easy goal.

The line between the two upper punctures of the panel was finished. Leiba went up, curious to see the working of the tool. His confidence became more pronounced. He nodded his head as though to say: "I still have time."

The saw cut the last fibre near the hole towards which it was working, and began to saw between the lower holes.

"There are still three," thought Leiba, and with the caution of the most experienced burglar he softly entered the inn. He searched under the bar, picked up something, and went out again as he entered, hiding the object he had in his hand as though he feared somehow the walls might betray him, and went back on tiptoe to the door.

Something terrible had happened; the work outside had ceased—there was nothing to be heard.

"What is the matter? Has he gone? What has happened?" flashed through the mind of the man inside. He bit his lower lip at such a thought, full of bitter disappointment.

"Ha, ha!" It was an imaginary deception; the work began again, and he followed it with the keenest interest, his heart beating fast. His decision was taken, he was tormented by an incredible desire to see the thing finished.

"Quicker!" he thought, with impatience. "Quicker!"

Again the sound of bells ringing on the hill.

"Hurry up, old fellow, the daylight will catch us!" said a voice outside, as though impelled by the will of the man within.

The work was pushed on rapidly. Only a few more movements and all the punctures in the panel would be united.

At last!

Gently the drill carried out the four-sided piece of wood. A large and supple hand was thrust in; but before it reached the bars it sought two screams were heard, while, with great force, Leiba enclosed it with the free end of the noose, which was round a block fixed to the cellar door.

The trap was ingeniously contrived: a long rope fastened round a block of wood; lengthwise, at the place where the sawn panel had disappeared, was a spring-ring which Leiba held open with his left hand, while at the same time his right hand held the other end taut. At the psychological moment he sprang the ring, and rapidly seizing the free end of the rope with both hands he pulled the whole arm inside by a supreme effort.

In a second the operation was complete. It was accompanied by two cries, one of despair, the other of triumph: the hand is "pinned to the spot." Footsteps were heard retreating rapidly: Gheorghe's companions were abandoning to Leiba the prey so cleverly caught.

The Jew hurried into the inn, took the lamp and with a decided movement turned up the wick as high as it would go: the light concealed by the metal receiver rose gay and victorious, restoring definite outlines to the nebulous forms around.

Zibal went into the passage with the lamp. The burglar groaned terribly; it was obvious from the stiffening of his arm that he had given up the

useless struggle. The hand was swollen, the fingers were curved as though they would seize something. The Jew placed the lamp near it—a shudder, the fever is returning. He moved the light quite close, until, trembling, he touched the burglar's hand with the burning chimney; a violent convulsion of the finger was followed by a dull groan. Leiba was startled at the sight of this phenomenon.

Leiba trembled—his eyes betrayed a strange exaltation. He burst into a shout of laughter which shook the empty corridor and resounded in the inn.

Day was breaking.

Sura woke up suddenly—in her sleep she seemed to hear a terrible moaning. Leiba was not in the room. All that had happened previously returned to her mind. Something terrible had taken place. She jumped out of bed and lighted the candle. Leiba's bed had not been disturbed. He had not been to bed at all.

Where was he? The woman glanced out of the window; on the hill in front shone a little group of small bright lights, they flared and jumped, now they died away, now, once more, soared upwards. They told of the Resurrection. Sura undid the window; then she could hear groans from down by the door. Terrified, she hurried down the stairs. The corridor was lighted up. As she emerged through the doorway, the woman was astonished by a horrible sight.

Upon a wooden chair, his elbows on his knees, his beard in his hand, sat Leiba. Like a scientist, who, by mixing various elements, hopes to surprise one of nature's subtle secrets which has long escaped and worried him, Leiba kept his eyes fixed upon some hanging object, black and shapeless, under which, upon another chair of convenient height, there burnt a big torch. He watched, without turning a hair, the process of decomposition of the hand which most certainly would not have spared him. He did not hear the groans of the unhappy being outside: he was more interested, at present, in watching than in listening.

He followed with eagerness each contortion, every strange convulsion of the fingers till one by one they became powerless. They were like the legs of a beetle which contract and stretch, waving in agitated movement, vigorously, then slower and slower until they lie paralysed by the play of some cruel child.

It was over. The roasted hand swelled slowly and remained motionless. Sura gave a cry.

"Leiba!"

He made a sign to her not to disturb him. A greasy smell of burnt flesh pervaded the passage: a crackling and small explosions were heard.

"Leiba! What is it?" repeated the woman.

It was broad day. Sura stretched forward and withdrew the bar. The door opened outwards, dragging with it Gheorghe's body, suspended by

the right arm. A crowd of villagers, all carrying lighted torches, invaded the premises.

"What is it? What is it?"

They soon understood what had happened. Leiba, who up to now had remained motionless, rose gravely to his feet. He made room for himself to pass, quietly pushing the crowd to one side.

"How did it happen, Jew?" asked some one.

"Leiba Zibal," said the innkeeper in a loud voice, and with a lofty gesture, "goes to Jassy to tell the Rabbi that Leiba Zibal is a Jew no longer. Leiba Zibal is a Christian—for Leiba Zibal has lighted a torch for Christ."

And the man moved slowly up the hill, towards the sunrise, like the prudent traveller who knows that the long journey is not achieved with hasty steps.

AT MANJOALA'S INN

By I. L. Caragiale

IT took a quarter of an hour to reach Manjoala's Inn. From there to Upper Popeshti was about nine miles ; at an easy pace, that meant one hour and a half. A good hack—if they gave it oats at the inn, and three-quarters' of an hour rest—could do it comfortably. That is to say, one quarter of an hour and three-quarters of an hour made one hour, on to Popeshti was one hour and a half, that made two and a half. It was past seven already ; at ten o'clock at latest, I should be with Pocovnicu Iordache. I was rather late—I ought to have started earlier—but, after all, he expected me.

I was turning this over in my mind when I saw in the distance, a good gun-shot length away, a great deal of light coming from Manjoala's Inn, for it still retained that name. It was now really Madame Manjoala's inn—the husband died some five years ago. What a capable woman ! How she had worked, how she had improved the place ! They were on the point of selling the inn while her

husband was alive. Since then she had paid off the debts, and had repaired the house; moreover, she had built a flight of stone steps, and every one said she had a good sum of money too. Some surmised that she had found a hidden treasure, others that she had dealings with the supernatural.

Once some robbers attempted an attack upon her. They tried to force the door. One of them, the strongest, a man like a bull, wielded the axe, but when he tried to strike he fell to the ground. They quickly raised him up—he was dead. His brother tried to speak, but could not—he was dumb. There were four of them. They hoisted the dead man on to his brother's back, the other two took his feet that they might carry him off to bury him somewhere away.

As they left the courtyard of the inn, Madame Manjoala began to scream from the window, "Thieves!" and in front of her there suddenly appeared the sub-prefect with numerous men and four mounted soldiers. The official shouted:

"Who is there?"

Two of the robbers escaped. The dumb man remained behind with his dead brother on his back.

Now what happened at the trial? Every one knew the mute had been able to speak. How could anyone doubt but that the dumb man was shamming? They beat him till he was crazy to try and make his speech come back, but in vain. Since then the lads had lost all desire to attack the place.

While all this was passing through my mind I arrived at the inn. A number of carts were waiting in the yard of the inn. Some were carrying timber down the valley ; others, maize up the hill.

It was a raw autumn evening. The drivers were warming themselves round the fire. It was the light from the latter that had been visible so far away. An ostler took my horse in charge to give him some oats in the stable. I entered the tap-room where a good many men were drinking, while two sleepy gipsies, one with a lute and one with a zither, were playing monotonously in a corner. I was hungry and cold. The damp had pierced through me.

"Where's your mistress?" I asked the boy behind the bar.

"By the kitchen fire."

"It ought to be warmer there," I said, and passed through the vestibule, out of the tap-room into the kitchen.

It was very clean in the kitchen, and the smell was not like that in the tap-room, of fur and boots and damp shoes ; there was a smell of new-made bread. Madame Manjoala was looking after the oven.

"Well met, Mistress Marghioala."

"Welcome, Mr. Fanica."

"Is there a chance of getting anything to eat?"

"Up to midnight even, for respectable people like yourself."

Mistress Marghioala quickly gave orders to one of the servants to lay a table in the next room, and then, going up to the hearth, said :

"Look, choose for yourself."

Mistress Marghioala was beautiful, well-built and fascinating, that I knew ; but never since I had known her—and I had known her for a long time, for I had passed Manjoala's Inn many a time when my dead father was alive, as the road to the town led by it—had she appeared to me more attractive. I was young, smart and daring, much more daring than smart. I came up on her left side as she was bending over the hearth, and took her by the waist ! with my hand I took hold of her right arm, which was as hard as iron, and the devil tempted me to give it a pinch.

"Have you got nothing to do ?" said the woman, looking at me askance.

But I, to cover my blunder, said :

"What marvellous eyes you have, Mistress Marghioala ! "

"Don't try and flatter me ; you had better tell me what to give you."

"Give me—give me—give me yourself."

"Really—— "

"Indeed, you have marvellous eyes, Mistress Marghioala ! " sighing.

"Supposing your father-in-law heard you ?"

"What father-in-law ? What do you mean by that ? "

"You think because you hide yourself under your cap that nobody sees what you do. Aren't you going to Pocovnicu Iordache to engage yourself to his eldest daughter? Come, don't look at me like that, go into the next room to dinner."

I had seen many clean and quiet rooms in the course of my life, but a room like that one! What a bed! What curtains! What walls! What a ceiling! All white as milk. And the lamp-shade, and all those crochet things of every kind and shape! And the warmth, like being under a hen's wing, and a smell of apples and quinces!

I was about to seat myself at the table, when, according to a habit I had acquired in my childhood, I turned to bow towards the east. I looked carefully round all along the walls—not an Icon to be seen.

"What are you looking for?" said Mistress Marghioala.

"Your Icons. Where do you keep them?"

"Dash the Icons! They only breed worms and wood-lice."

What a cleanly woman! I seated myself at the table, and crossed myself as was my custom, when suddenly there was a yell. It appeared that with the heel of my boot I had trodden upon an old Tom cat which was under the table.

Mistress Marghioala jumped up quickly and undid the outside door. The injured cat made a bound outside while the cold air rushed in and extinguished the lamp. She groped about for the

matches. I searched here, she searched there. We met face to face in the dark. I, very bold, took her in my arms and began to kiss her. The lady now resisted, now yielded ; her cheeks were burning, her mouth was cold, soft down fluttered about her ears. At last the servant arrived with a tray with viands on it, and a light. We must have hunted some time for the matches, for the chimney of the lamp was quite cold. I lit it again.

What excellent food ! Hot bread, roast duck with cabbage, boiled veal sausages, and wine ! And Turkish coffee ! And laughter and conversation ! Good luck to Mistress Marghioala !

After coffee she said to the old maidservant :

" Tell them to bring out a half-bottle of muscadine."

That wonderful old wine ! A sort of languor seized my every limb. I sat on one side of the bed, draining the last amber drops from my glass, and smoking a cigarette, while through the cloud of tobacco smoke I watched Mistress Marghioala who sat on a chair opposite rolling cigarettes for me. I said :

" Indeed, Mistress Marghioala, you have marvellous eyes ! Do you know what ? "

" What ? "

" Would it trouble you to make me another cup of coffee, not quite so sweet as this ? "

How she laughed ! When the maid brought the coffee-pot, she said :

"Madam, you sit talking here—you don't know what it is like outside."

"What is it?"

"A high wind has got up, and there is a storm coming."

I jumped to my feet and looked at the time; it was nearly a quarter to eleven. Instead of half an hour, I had been at the inn for two hours and a half! That's what comes when one begins to talk.

"Let some one get my horse!"

"Who? The ostlers have gone to bed."

"I will go to the stables myself."

"They have bewitched you at Pocovnicu!" said the lady with a ripple of laughter, as she barred my passage through the door.

I put her gently on one side and went out on to the veranda. It was indeed a dreadful night. The drivers' fires had died down, men and animals were sleeping on the straw, lying one against the other on the ground, while above them the wind howled wildly.

"There is a great storm," said Mistress Marghioala, shuddering as she seized me firmly by the hand. "You are mad to start in such weather. Stay the night here: start at daybreak to-morrow."

"That's impossible."

I forcibly withdrew my hand. I proceeded to the stables. With great difficulty I roused an ostler and found my horse. I tightened the girths, fastened the horse to the steps, and then went to

the room to bid my hostess good night. The woman, immersed in thought, was sitting on the bed with my cap in her hand. She was turning and twisting it about.

"How much have I to pay?" I asked.

"You can pay me when you come back," replied my hostess, looking intently into the lining of my cap.

And then she rose to her feet and held it out to me. I took the cap, and put it on my head, rather on one side.

I said, looking straight into the woman's eyes, which seemed to shine most strangely:

"I kiss your eyes, Mistress Marghioala!"

"A safe journey to you."

I threw myself into the saddle, the old servant opened the gate for me, and out I rode. Resting my left hand on my horse's flank, I turned my head round. Over the top of the fence could be seen the open door of the room, and in the opening was outlined the white figure of the woman with her hand above her arched eyebrows.

I rode at a slow pace whistling a gay song to myself until I turned the corner of the fence to get to the road, when the picture was hidden from my sight. I said to myself, "Here we go!" and crossed myself. At that moment I plainly heard the banging of a door and the mew of a cat. My hostess, unable to see me any longer, went hastily back into the warmth and doubtless caught the cat

in the door. That damned cat! It was always getting under people's feet.

I had gone a good part of the way. The storm increased and shook me in the saddle. Overhead, cloud after cloud hurried across the valley and above the hill, as though in fear of chastisement from on high; now massed together, now dispersed, they revealed at long intervals the pale light of the waning moon.

The damp cold pierced through me. I felt it paralysing legs and arms. As I rode with head bent to avoid the buffeting of the wind, I began to feel pains in my neck; my forehead and temples were burning, and there was a drumming in my ears.

"I have drunk too much," I thought to myself, as I pushed my cap on to the nape of my neck, and raised my forehead towards the sky.

But the whirling clouds made me dizzy. I felt a burning sensation below my left rib. I drew in a deep breath of cold air, and a knife seemed to drive right through my chest. I tucked my chin down again. My cap seemed to squeeze my head like a vice. I took it off and placed it on the point of my saddle. I felt ill. It was foolish of me to have started. Everybody would be asleep at Pocovnicu Iordache. They would not have expected me. They would not have imagined that I should be silly enough to start in such weather. I urged on my horse which staggered as though it, too, had been drinking.

The wind had sunk, the rain had ceased. It

was misty ; it began to grow dark and to drizzle. I put my cap on again. Suddenly the blood began to beat against my temples. The horse was quite done, exhausted by the violence of the wind. I dug my heels into him, I gave him a cut with my whip ; the animal took a few hasty paces, then snorted, and stood still on the spot as though he had seen some unexpected obstacle in front of him. I looked. I really saw, a few paces in front of the horse, a tiny creature jumping and skipping. An animal ! What could it be ? A wild beast ? It was a very small one. I put my hand to my revolver ; then I clearly heard the bleat of a kid.

I urged on the horse as much as I could. It turned straight round and started to go back. A few paces forward, and again it stood snorting. The kid again ! The horse stopped ; it turned round. I gave it some cuts with the whip and tightened the curb. It moved forward—a few paces—the kid again !

The clouds had dispersed. One could see now as clearly as possible. It was a little black kid. Now it trotted forward, now it turned back, it flung out its hooves, and finally reared itself on to its hind legs and ran about with its little beard in front, and its head ready to butt, making wonderful bounds and playing every kind of wild antic.

I got off my horse, which would not advance for the world, and took the reins up short. I bent down to the ground.

"Come, come!" I called the kid, with my hand as though I wanted to give it some bran.

The kid approached, jumping continually. The horse snorted madly, it tried to break away. I went down on my knees, but I held the horse firmly. The kid came close up to my hand. It was a dear little black buck which allowed itself to be petted and lifted up. I put it in the bag on the right side among some clothes. At that moment the horse was convulsed and shook in every limb as though in its death throes.

I remounted. The horse started off like a mad thing. For some time it went like the wind over ditches, over mole-hills, over bushes, without my being able to stop it, without my knowing where I was, or being able to guess where it was taking me. During this wild chase, when at any moment I might have broken my neck, with body frozen and head on fire, I thought of the comfortable haven I had so stupidly left. Why? Mistress Marghioala would have given me her room, otherwise she would not have invited me.

The kid was moving in the bag, trying to make itself more comfortable. I looked towards it; with its intelligent little head stuck out of the bag it was peering wisely at me. The thought of another pair of eyes flashed through my mind. What a fool I'd been.

The horse stumbled; I stopped him forcibly; he tried to move on again, but sank to his knees.

Suddenly, through an opening in the clouds, appeared the waning moon, shining on the side of a slope. The sight of it struck me all of a heap. It was in front of me! There were then two moons in the sky! I was going uphill; the moon ought to be behind me! I turned my head quickly to see the real moon. I had missed my way—I was going downhill! Where was I? I looked ahead—a maize-field with uncut stalks; behind me lay open field. I crossed myself, and pressing my horse with my weary legs, I tried to help him rise. Just then I felt a violent blow on my right foot. A cry! I had kicked the kid! I put my hand quickly into the bag; the bag was empty. I had lost the kid on the road! The horse rose shaking its head as though it were giddy. It reared on to its hind legs, hurled itself on one side, and threw me to the other; finally he tore away like a thing possessed and disappeared into the darkness.

By the time I got up, much shaken, I could hear a rustle among the maize, and close by came the sound of a man's voice saying clearly:

"Hi! Hi! May Heaven remove you!"

"Who is there?" I called.

"An honest man."

"Who?"

"Gheorghe."

"Which Gheorghe?"

"Natrut—Gheorghe Natrut, who watches the maize-fields."

"Aren't you coming this way?"

"Yes, here I come."

And the figure of a man became visible among the maize.

"May I ask, brother Gheorghe, where we are at this moment? I have missed my way in the storm."

"Where do you want to go to?"

"To Upper Popeshti."

"Eh! To Pocovnicu Iordache."

"That's it."

"In that case you have not missed your road. You'll have some trouble to get to Popeshti—you are only at Haculeshti here."

"At Haculeshti?" I said joyfully. "Then I am close to Manjoala's Inn."

"Look there; we are at the back of the stables."

"Come and show me the way so that I don't just go and break my neck."

I had been wandering about for four hours. A few steps brought us to the inn. Mistress Marghioala's room was lit up and shadows moved across the curtain. Who knew what other, wiser traveller had enjoyed that bed! I should have to rest content with some bench by the kitchen fire. But what luck! As I knocked some one heard me. The old maidservant hurried to open to me. As I entered I stumbled over something soft on the threshold. The kid! Did you ever! It was my

hostess' kid! It, too, entered the room and went and lay down comfortably under the bed.

What was I to say? Did the woman know I had returned, or had she got up very early? The bed was made.

"Mistress Marghioala!" So much I was able to say.

Wishing to thank God that I had escaped with my life, I started to raise my right hand to my head.

The lady quickly seized my hand and pulling it down, drew me with all her strength into her arms.

I can still see that room. What a bed! What curtains! What walls! What a ceiling! All white as milk. And the lamp-shade, and all those crochet things of every kind and shape! And the warmth, like being under a hen's wing, and a smell of apples and quinces!

. . . . .

I should have stayed a long time at Manjoala's Inn if my father-in-law, Pocovnicu Iordache, God forgive him, had not fetched me away by force. Three times I fled from him before the marriage, and returned to the inn, until the old man, who at all cost wanted me for a son-in-law, set men to catch me and take me gagged to a little monastery in the mountains. Forty days of fasting, genuflexions and prayers. I left it quite repentant. I got engaged and I married.

Only lately, one clear winter's night, while my father-in-law and I were sitting talking together, as

is the custom of the country, in front of a flagon of wine, we heard from a prefect, who arrived from the town where he had been making some purchases, that during the day there had been a big fire at Haculeshti. Manjoala's Inn had been burnt to the ground, burying poor Mistress Marghioala, who thus met her end under a gigantic funeral pyre.

"And so at the last the sorceress was thrown on the bonfire!" said my father-in-law, laughing.

And I began to tell the above story for at least the hundredth time. Pocovnicu maintained, among other things, that the lady put a charm into the lining of my cap, and that the kid and the cat were one and the same.

"May be," I said.

"She was the devil, listen to me."

"She may have been," I replied, "but if that is so, then the devil, it seems, leads to the good."

"At first it seems to be good, to catch one, but later one sees where it leads one."

"How do you know all this?"

"That's not your business," replied the old man, "that's another story!"

ALEXANDRU LAPUSHNEANU

1564–1569

By C. Negruzzi

JACOB ERACLID, surnamed the "Despot," perished by the hand of Shtefan Tomsha, who then proceeded to govern the land, but Alexandru Lapushneanu, after two successive defeats at the hands of the tyrant's forces, fled to Constantinople, succeeded in securing aid from the Turkish army, and returned to drive out the rapacious Tomsha, and seize for himself the throne which he never would have lost had the boyars not betrayed him. He entered Moldavia accompanied by seven thousand spahees and three thousand mixed troops. He also brought with him imperial orders for Han Tatar Nogai to collect some troops with which to come to his aid.

Lapushneanu rode with Vornic Bogdan by his side, both were mounted upon Turkish stallions, and were armed from head to foot.

"What think you, Bogdan," he said after a short pause, "shall we succeed?"

"How can your Highness doubt it," replied the courtier, "the country groans under the harshness of Tomsha. The whole army will surrender when you promise them higher pay. Those boyars who are still left alive are only held back by fear of death, but when they see that your Highness comes with force they will at once flock to you, and desert the other."

"Please God we shall not be obliged to do what Voda Mircea did in Muntenia; but as I have told you, I know our boyars, for I have lived among them."

"This matter must be left to your Highness's sagacity."

Thus speaking they drew near to Tecuci where they halted by a wood.

"Sire," said a messenger approaching, "some boyars have arrived, and crave an audience of your Highness."

"Let them come," replied Alexandru.

Four boyars soon entered the tent, where he was sitting surrounded by his boyars and officers; two of them were elderly men but the other two were young. They were Vornic Motzoc, Postelnic Veveritza, Spancioc, the noble, and Stroici. They approached Voda Alexandru, and bowed to the ground, but without kissing the hem of his garment as was the custom.

"Welcome, boyars!" said Alexandru, forcing himself to smile.

"Good health to your Highness," replied the boyars.

"I have heard," pursued Alexandru, "of the affliction of the land, and I have come to deliver it; I know the country awaits me with joy."

"Do not imagine that it is so, your Highness," said Motzoc. "The country is quiet; it may be your Highness has heard things that are not really facts, it being the habit of our people to make stallions out of mosquitoes. For this reason the community has sent us to tell you that the people do not want you, no one loves you, and your Highness has only to turn back——"

"You may not want me, I want you," replied Lapushneanu, and his eyes flashed like lightning. "You may not love me, I will love you, and will come among you with your consent or without it. I turn back? Sooner may the Danube change its course! Ah! The country does not want me? Do I understand that you do not want me?"

"One dare not behead ambassadors," said Spancioc. "We are bound to tell you the truth. The boyars have decided to take their way to Hungary, to Poland, and to Muntenia, where they all have relations and friends. They will come with foreign armies, and woe betide the poor country when we have war between us, and maybe your Highness will not do well because Shtefan Tomsha——"

"Tomsha! Has he taught you to speak with

such temerity? I know not what prevents me from smashing the teeth in your jaw with this club," he said, seizing the weapon from Bogdan's hand. "Has that wretched Tomsha taught you?"

"He who is worthy to be named the Anointed of God cannot be wretched," said Veveritza.

"Am not I, too, the Anointed of God? Did you not swear fealty to me when I was only Petre Stolnic? Did you not choose me? What was my reign like! What blood have I shed? Whom have I turned from my door without due reward and help? And yet you do not want me, do not love me? Ha, ha, ha!"

He laughed; a laugh that distorted the muscles of his face, and his eyes blinked incessantly.

"With your Highness's permission," said Stroici, "we see that our country will once more be under the heel of the heretics. When these hordes of Turks have robbed and devastated the land, over whom will your Highness reign?"

"And with what will you satisfy the greed of these heretics, whom your Highness has brought with you?" added Spancioc.

"With your possessions, not with the money of the peasants whom you fleece. You milk the country dry, but now the time has come when I will milk you dry. Enough, boyars! Return and tell him who sent you to be on his guard lest I catch him, if he would not have me make flutes

out of his bones, and cases for my drums out of his skin."

The boyars retired sadly ; Motzoc remained.

"Why do you stay ?" asked Lapushneanu.

"Sire ! Sire !" said Motzoc, falling on his knees. "Reward us not after our iniquities ! Remember this is your native land, remember the scriptural admonition to forgive your enemies ! Have pity on the poor land. Sire ! dismiss these pagan armies ; come with only a few Moldavians with you, and we will guarantee that not a hair of your Highness's head shall be touched ; and if you need armies we will arm our women and our children, we will raise the country, we will call up our retainers and our neighbours. Trust yourself to us ! "

"Trust myself to you ?" said Lapushneanu, comprehending his plan. "Perchance you think I do not know the Moldavian proverb : 'The wolf may change his skin, but never his habits' ? Perchance I do not know you, you especially ? Do I not know that when my army was outnumbered, when you saw that I was defeated, you abandoned me ? Veveritza is an old enemy of mine, but he has never concealed the fact ; Spancioc is still young, his heart is full of love for his country ; it pleases me to see his pride which he does not attempt to conceal. Stroici is a child, who does not understand men yet, and does not know the meaning of flattery, or a lie ; to him it seems that

all birds that fly are fit to eat. But you, Motzoc, seasoned veteran of hard times, accustomed to fawn on every ruler, you have sold the Despot; you have sold me too, and will now sell Tomsha; tell me, should I not be an arch fool to put my trust in you? Still, I pardon you for daring to think that you could cheat me, and I promise you my sword shall not stain itself with your blood; I will spare you, for you are useful to me and will help to bear my blame. The others are all drones, and the hive must be freed from them."

Motzoc kissed his hand, like the dog which, instead of biting, licks the hand that beats him. He was grateful for the promise given him. He knew that Voda Alexandru would have need of an intriguer like himself. The deputies had been commanded by Tomsha, in the event of their being unable to turn Lapushneanu from his path, to take the road to Constantinople, where by means of petitions and bribes they were to try and compass his overthrow. But seeing that he came with the good will of the Porte itself, and, moreover, fearing to return without any success to Tomsha, he begged leave to remain in his company. This was Motzoc's plan that he might himself adhere to Lapushneanu. Leave was granted him.

. . . . .

Tomsha, not finding himself in a position to offer resistance, fled into Valahia, and Lapushneanu found no obstacle in his path. The people round

met him with joy and hope, reminding themselves of his first reign, during which he had not had time to develop his odious character.

But the boyars trembled. They had two great reasons to be anxious : they knew that the people hated them, and the monarch did not love them.

Immediately upon his arrival Lapushneanu gave orders that all the Moldavian towns, except Hotin, should be piled high with wood and burnt, wishing thus to destroy the refuge of the discontented, who many times, under the protection of their walls, hatched plots and attempted rebellion. In order to undermine the influence of the boyars, and to root out the feudal communities, he despoiled them of their estates under every kind of pretext ; in this way he deprived them of their only means of reducing and corrupting the populace.

But not deeming this plan sufficient he put persons to death from time to time. For the smallest official mistake, upon the utterance of the slightest complaint, the head of the culprit was spiked upon the gates of the churchyard, with a placard setting forth his fault, real or imaginary ; the rotting head was only removed to make room for another.

No one dared to speak against him, much less plot. A numerous guard of mercenaries, Albanians, Serbs, Hungarians, driven out on account of their misdeeds, found shelter with Alexandru, who bribed them with high pay ; the Moldavian army, under

captains who were his own creatures, he kept on the frontiers, he gave the soldiers leave to go to their own homes, retaining only a small number.

One day he was walking alone in the saloon of the royal palace. He had had a long talk with Motzoc, who was in great favour, and who had departed after devising a scheme for some fresh tax. He seemed restless, he talked to himself, and was evidently meditating another death or some fresh persecution when a side door opened, and admitted the Princess Rucsanda.

At the death of her parent, the good Petru Raresh, who—says the chronicle—was buried amidst much lamentation and mourning in the sacred Monastery of Probota, erected by himself, Rucsanda remained, at a tender age, under the guardianship of her two elder brothers, Iliash and Shtefan : Iliash, succeeding his father upon the throne, after a short and stormy reign, retired to Constantinople where he embraced Mohammedanism, and Shtefan took his place upon the throne. This man was more cruel than his brother ; he began by compelling all strangers and Catholics to renounce their religion, and many rich families settled in the country went into exile on this account, giving as a pretext the poverty of the land and the decline in trade. The boyars, many of whom were related by marriage to the Poles and Hungarians, took offence, and entering into communication with the exiled boyars decided that Shtefan should perish. Perhaps they would have

delayed to put this plan into execution if his excesses had not hastened it on. "No woman was safe from his lust if she were fair," says the chronicler in his naïve fashion. One day when he was at Tzutzora, instead of waiting for the arrival of the exiled boyars, the boyars who were with him cut the ropes of the tent under which he was seated, in order to prevent his escape, and rushing upon him murdered him.

After this Rucsanda alone remained of the family of Petru Raresh, and the murderous boyars decided to give her as wife to one of their number called Jolde, whom they had chosen to be their ruler. But Lapushneanu, chosen by the exiled boyars, met Jolde, whom he defeated, and seizing him he cut off his nose, and turned him into a monk; in order to win the hearts of the people, who still kept a lively recollection of Raresh, he married, and took to himself Raresh's daughter. Thus the gentle Rucsanda found herself the partner of the conqueror.

When she entered the hall she was clothed with all the magnificence due to the wife, daughter and sister of a king.

Above a long garment of cloth of gold, open in front, she wore a tight coat of blue velvet trimmed with sable, and with long sleeves falling back; she wore a girdle of gold which fastened with big clasps of jasper surrounded by precious stones; round her neck hung a necklace of many rows of pearls. A cap of sable, placed rather on one side, was

ornamented with a white aigrette studded with jewels and held in place by a big emerald flower. Her hair, according to the fashion of the day, was parted and hung in braids over her back and shoulders. Her face was of that beauty which once made famous the Roumanian women, but which is rarely found to-day, for it has degenerated through the mingling of foreign blood. She was also sad and languishing, like a flower exposed unshaded to the burning heat of the sun. She had seen her father die, had witnessed the abdication and withdrawal of one brother and the murder of another. She had first of all been destined by the community to be the wife of Jolde—whom she did not know—then she was forced by that same community, who disposed without question of her heart, to give her hand to Alexandru Voda whom she honoured and obeyed as her husband, and whom she would have been ready to love had she found in him the least trace of human feeling. Drawing near, she bent and kissed his hand. Lapushneanu took her by the waist, and lifting her as though she were a feather placed her upon his knee.

"What tidings, my fair lady?" he said, kissing her on the brow. "For what reason have you to-day, which is not a feast day, deserted your spinning-wheel? What has roused you so early?"

"The tears the widowed women shed at my door, and which cry to the Lord Christ and the Holy Virgin for vengeance for all the blood you shed."

Lapushneanu's face grew dark, and he unclasped his hands; Rucsanda fell at his feet.

"Oh, good my Lord! my brave husband!" she continued. "It is enough! You have spilt so much blood, made so many widows, so many orphans. Consider that your Highness is all powerful, and that a few poor boyars cannot harm you. What does your Highness lack? You are not at war with anyone; the land is quiet and submissive. I—God knows how much I love you! Your Highness's children are fair and young. Reflect that after life comes death, and that your Highness is mortal and must give acount of his deeds, for blood is not redeemed by building monasteries; especially is it tempting and insulting God to deem that you can propitiate him by erecting churches and——"

"Thoughtless woman!" cried Lapushneanu, jumping to his feet, and from force of habit he put his hand to the dagger at his belt; but instantly controlling himself, he bent forward, and raising Rucsanda from the floor he said: "My wife, do not let such foolish words escape your lips, for God only knows what might happen. Be thankful to the great saint and martyr, Dimitric Isvoritor, of blessed memory, to whose honour we dedicate the church which we have built at Pangaratzi, that he has hindered us from committing a great sin, and caused us to remember that you are the mother of our children."

"Even though I know you will murder me I cannot keep silence. Yesterday when I wished to come in, a woman with five children threw herself in front of my carriage and stopped me to show me a head fastened to the courtyard gate. 'You will have to answer for it, Madam,' she said to me, 'if you allow your husband to behead our fathers, husbands and brothers. See, Madam, that is my husband, the father of these children who are left orphans! Look well.' And she showed me the gory head, and the head looked terribly at me! Ah, Sire, since then I see that head incessantly, and I am afraid! I cannot rest!"

"What will you?" asked Lapushneanu, smiling.

"I will that you spill no more blood, that you cease to kill, that I may see no more decapitated heads which make my heart break."

"I promise you that after the day after to-morrow you will see no more," replied Alexandru Voda, "and to-morrow I will give you a remedy for fear."

"What? What does that mean?"

"To-morrow you will see. Now, sweet lady, go and see your children, and attend to your house like a good mistress, and see to the preparations for a feast, for to-morrow I give a great dinner to the boyars."

The Princess Rucsanda departed after once more kissing his hand. Her husband accompanied her to the door.

"Ah, have you arranged everything?" he asked, moving quickly towards his esquire who entered at that moment.

"Everything is ready."

"But will they come?"

"They will come."

. . . . . .

At eventide came the news that on the next day, being Sunday, all the boyars were to assemble at the Metropolitan Church, where the Prince would be present to attend the Liturgy, and afterwards were to feast at the court.

Upon the arrival of Alexandru Voda divine service began; the boyars were all assembled. Contrary to his usual custom, Lapushneanu was dressed with regal splendour that day. He wore the crown of the Paleologs; over his long Polish tunic of crimson velvet, he wore a Turkish royal cloak. He carried no weapon except a small dagger, inlaid with gold; but between the fastenings of the tunic could be seen a shirt of mail.

After listening to divine service he descended from his stall, prostrated himself before the Icon, and approaching the shrine of St. John the New, bent forward with great humility and kissed the sacred relics. It is said that at that moment his face was very yellow, and that the saintly shrine shook.

Then once more ascending his stall, he turned to the boyars and said:

"Most noble boyars! From the time I assumed kingship until this day, I have shown myself harsh towards many: I have been cruel, severe, shedding much blood. Only God knows how hard this has been for me, and how I regret it, but you, boyars, know that I have only been constrained thereto by the desire to end the various quarrels and disputes which aimed at the disturbance of the country and my destruction. To-day the state of affairs is different. The boyars have come to their senses; they have realized that the flock cannot exist without a shepherd as the Saviour said: 'They were distressed and scattered as sheep not having a shepherd.' Most noble boyars! Let us henceforth live in peace, loving one another like brothers, for this is one of the ten commandments: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,' and let us pardon one another, seeing that we are mortal, beseeching our Lord Jesus Christ"—here he made the sign of the cross—"to forgive us our daily trespasses as we forgive those that trespass against us."

Having finished this disjointed speech, he passed to the centre of the church, and after prostrating himself once more turned towards the people in front, and to the right and to the left of him, saying:

"Pardon me, good people, and you also, most noble boyars!"

"May God forgive you, your Highness!" they all replied, except two young boyars who were stand-

ing lost in thought, hidden by a tomb near the door, where no one paid heed to them.

Lapushneanu left the church, bidding the boyars come and dine together with him ; he mounted his horse and returned to the palace.

The people dispersed.

"What do you think of it?" said one of the boyars, who, we have seen, did not extend his pardon to Alexandru Voda.

"I advise you not to dine with him to-day," replied the other.

And they mixed with the crowd. They were Spancioc and Stroici.

At the court great preparations had been made for this feast. The news had spread that the Prince had made his peace with the boyars, and the boyars rejoiced at the change, in the hopes they would once more occupy positions whence they could amass fresh wealth at the expense of the sweating peasants. As to the people, they were indifferent ; they neither expected good nor feared evil from this reconciliation. The people were reconciled to the rule of Alexandru Voda. They only grumbled about his Minister, Motzoc, who took advantage of his credit with the Prince to cheat the mass of the people. Thus, although the complaints of the community were continual about the thefts of Motzoc, Lapushneanu either would not answer them or would not listen to them.

As the hour of the feast drew near, the boyars

arrived on horseback, each accompanied by two or three retainers. They noticed that the courtyard was full of armed mercenaries and that four guns were trained upon the doors, but they concluded they were placed there to fire the usual ceremonial salute. Perhaps one or two suspected a trap, but once inside it was impossible to return, for the gates were guarded and the sentries had orders to let no one pass out.

Lapushneanu joined the boyars, forty-seven in number, and placed himself at the head of the table, placing the Chancellor, Trotushan, upon his right, and Home Secretary, Motzoc, upon his left. The pipes began to play, and the viands were placed upon the table.

In Moldavia at that period there was nothing remarkable in the fashion of the food. The banquet only comprised a few varieties of dishes. After the Polish soup came Greek dishes of boiled vegetables floating in butter, then Turkish rice and finally a roast. The table-cloth was of home-spun linen. The dishes containing the food, the plates and the goblets, were of silver. Along the wall stood a row of earthenware jars full of wine from Odobeshti and from Cotnari, and at the back of each boyar waited some servant who poured out the wine.

In the courtyard by the side of two roast oxen and four roast sheep, three casks of wine had been broached ; the retainers ate and drank, the boyars

ate and drank. Soon brains began to get inflamed: the wine began to do its work. The boyars saluted, and congratulated the Prince with loud applause, to which the mercenaries responded with shouts and the guns with salvos.

They were on the point of rising from the table when Veveritza raised his glass, and bowing, said:

"May your Highness live for many years! May you rule the land in peace and may a merciful God strengthen the desire you have shown to no longer molest the boyars or afflict the people——"

He did not finish for the dagger of an esquire struck him right on the forehead and felled him to the ground.

"Ah, you would insult your Prince!" cried the esquire. "Upon them!"

In a second, all the servants behind the boyars drew their daggers and struck them; other soldiers under the captain of mercenaries entered and slashed at them with their swords. In the meanwhile Lapushneanu took Motzoc by the hand and drew him to the open window whence to watch the butchery which began. He laughed; but Motzoc, forcing himself to laugh, felt the hair rising upon his head, and his teeth chattering. And, in truth, it was horrible to watch that bloody scene. The fancy must picture a hall 33 ft. long and 30 ft. wide, a hundred and more desperate men, determined to kill, executioners and victims, some

fighting with the fury of despair, others with drunken rage. The boyars had had no suspicions, thus treacherously attacked from behind, and unarmed, they fell unable to defend themselves. The older men died making the sign of the cross ; but many of the younger ones defended themselves with desperation ; chairs, plates, the implements upon the table became weapons in their hands ; some of the wounded gripped with fury the throats of the assassins, and in spite of the injuries they received they squeezed them till they suffocated. If one among them found a sword he sold his life dearly. Many a mercenary perished, but finally not a boyar remained alive. Forty-seven corpses lay upon the floor ! In the struggle and turmoil the table was overturned ; the jars were broken and the wine mixed with blood made a pool upon the boards of the hall.

Simultaneously with the murder upstairs began the massacre in the courtyard.

The boyars' servants, finding themselves set upon without warning by the soldiers, tried to flee. Only a few escaped with their lives ; they succeeded in scaling the walls and gave the alarm in the boyars' homes : they called out others of the boyars' retainers and men, and roused the populace. The whole city flocked to the gates of the courtyard, which they began to destroy with axes. The soldiers, stupid with drink, made little resistance. The crowd grew stronger and stronger.

Lapushneanu, when he recognized the strength of the crowd, sent an esquire to inquire what they wished. The esquire went out.

"Well, Vornic Motzoc," he said, turning towards that person, "tell me, have I not done well to rid myself of this rabble, to free the land from this sore?"

"Your Highness has acted with great wisdom," replied the obsequious courtier; "I have long had it in my mind to advise your Highness to do this, but I see your Highness's sagacity has anticipated me, and you have done well to destroy; because—why—it was——"

"I see the esquire tarries," said Lapushneanu, cutting short Motzoc, who was becoming involved in his speech. "I think we will give orders to fire a round into the mob. Ha! what think you?"

"Certainly, certainly, let us turn the guns on them; there is not much loss in a few hundred churls dying when so many boyars have perished. Yes, let us destroy them root and branch."

"I expected just such an answer," said Lapushneanu with irritation, "but we will see first what it is they ask."

At that moment the esquire stepped through the door into the courtyard, and making a sign, cried:

"Good people! His Highness sends to inquire what it is you want and ask, and wherefore you are come with so much noise?"

The crowd stood open-mouthed. They had not expected such a question. They had come without knowing why, or what they wanted. They collected quietly into little groups and asked one another what it was they did want. At last they began to shout:

"Remit the taxes!" "Cease to harass us!" "Do not kill us!" "Do not rob us!" "We remain poor!" "We have no money!" "Motzoc has taken our all!" "Motzoc! Motzoc!" "He fleeces us and ruins us!" "He advises the Voda!" "Let him die!" "To death with Motzoc!" "We want the head of Motzoc!"

The last words found an echo in every heart, and were like an electric spark. All the voices rang together as one voice, and this voice cried:

"We ask for Motzoc's head!"

"What do they ask for?" asked Lapushneanu, as the esquire entered.

"The head of Vornic Motzoc," replied the esquire.

"How? What?" cried Motzoc, jumping like a man who has trodden on a serpent. "You did not hear aright, fool! You try to jest, but this is no time for jesting. What words are these! What would they do with my head? I tell you, you are deaf, you did not hear well."

"But very well," said Alexandru Voda, "just listen. Their cries are audible here."

In fact, as the soldiers no longer resisted them, the people had begun to clamber up the walls whence they shouted at the top of their voices :

"Give us Motzoc!" "We want Motzoc's head!"

"Oh, miserable sinner that I am!" cried the wretched man, "most Holy Mother of God, do not let me be destroyed. What have I done to these men? Holy Virgin save me from this danger, and I swear to build a church to pray for the rest of my days, I will enshrine with silver the miracle-working Icon from the Neamtzu Monastery. But gracious Prince, do not listen to these common people, to these churls. Command that the guns decimate them. Let them all die! I am a great boyar, they are only churls!"

"Churls, but many of them," replied Lapushneanu coldly : "would it not be a sin to murder many men for the sake of one? Only reflect. Go and sacrifice yourself for the good of the realm, as you yourself said when you told me that the country neither wanted me nor loved me. Rejoice that the people repay you for the service you rendered me, betraying to me the army of Anton Sechele, then destroying me, and taking Tomsha's side."

"Oh, unfortunate man that I am!" cried Motzoc, tearing his beard, for he realized from the tyrant's words that there was no escape for him. "At least let me go and put my house in order! Have pity upon my wife and children! Give me

time to confess!" And he cried and screamed and groaned.

"Enough!" cried Lapushneanu. "Do not wail like a woman. Be a brave Roumanian. What can you confess? What can you say to the priest? That you are a thief and robber? All Moldavia knows that. Come! Take him and give him to the people and tell them that this is the way Alexandru Voda serves those who rob the country."

The esquire and the captain of mercenaries immediately laid hands upon him.

The wretched boyar yelled as loudly as possible, trying to protect himself, but how could his old hands shield him from the four strong arms that carried him? He tried to stand upon his feet, but they caught in the dead bodies of the victims and slipped upon the blood which had congealed upon the boards. As last his strength became exhausted, and the tyrant's satellites carried him more dead than alive to the door of the courtyard, and thrust him out among the crowd.

The miserable boyar fell into the arms of the many-headed Hydra, which in a second tore him to pieces.

"See how Alexandru Voda rewards those who rob the land!" said the tyrant's emissaries.

"Long live His Highness the Voda!" replied the crowd. And they dispersed, rejoicing over their victim.

While the unhappy Motzoc was being thus

treated, Lapushneanu ordered that the table should be replaced, and the utensils collected ; the heads of the murdered were then cut off, and the bodies thrown out of the window. After which, he took the heads and quietly and methodically set them in the middle of the table ; he placed the less important boyars below, and the more important above, according to their family and rank, until he had made a pyramid of forty-seven heads, the top of which he crowned with the head of an important Logofat. Then after washing his hands, he went to a side door, withdrew the bolt and wooden bar which secured it, and entered the Princess's apartment.

From the beginning of this tragedy, the Princess Rucsanda, ignorant of what was taking place, had been anxious. She did not understand the cause of the noise she heard, for, according to the custom of the time, women could not leave their apartment, and the servants could not risk going amongst soldiers of whose discipline they knew nothing. One among them, bolder than the others, had gone out, had heard it said that an attack had been made upon the Voda, and had carried these tidings to her mistress.

The gentle Princess was terrified, fearing the fury of the mob, and when Alexandru entered he found her praying before the Icon, with her children by her side.

"Ah," she cried, "our Lady be praised that I see you again ! I have been greatly frightened."

"Wherefore? Because I promised I would prepare you a remedy for fear? Come with me, Madam."

"But those cries, those shouts we heard?"

"Nothing. The servants began to wrangle, but they are quiet now."

So saying he took Rucsanda by the hand, and led her to the dining-hall. She gave a cry of horror at the terrible sight and fainted.

"A woman is always a woman," said Lapushneanu, smiling, "instead of rejoicing, she is horrified."

He lifted her in his arms, and took her back to her apartment. Then he returned again to the hall where he found the captain of mercenaries and the esquire awaiting him.

"You can throw these corpses over the wall to the dogs, but set their heads upon the wall," he said to the mercenary. "And you," he said, addressing the esquire, "are to lay hands upon Spancioc and Stroici."

But Stroici and Spancioc were already close to the Dniester.

Their pursuers only caught up with them when they had crossed the frontier.

"Tell him who sent you," Spancioc shouted back, "that he will not see us till he is about to die!"

. . . . .

Four years passed since this scene, during which

time Alexandru Lapushneanu, faithful to the promise made to the Princess Rucsanda, did not execute a single boyar. But, because he was unable to stifle his overmastering desire to witness human suffering, he invented various forms of torture.

He had eyes put out, noses cut off, he mutilated and maimed any person he suspected ; even his suspicions were imaginary, for no one ventured to make the slightest complaint. All the same he was not at ease, for he could not lay hands on Spancioc and Stroici, who remained at Kamenitza, waiting, abiding their time. Although he had two highly-placed sons-in-law with great influence at the Polish court, he was anxious lest these two boyars should solicit the aid of the Poles, who were only seeking a pretext to invade Moldavia ; but these two Roumanians were too good patriots not to reflect that war and the arrival of foreign soldiers would be the ruin of their native land.

Lapushneanu wrote to them many times in succession that if they would only return he would pledge himself, by the most sacred oath, to do them no harm ; but they knew the value of his oath. In order to observe them more closely, he moved to the town of Hotin which he fortified with care, but he became ill from spleen here. The disease made rapid strides, and the tyrant soon saw himself at the portal of the tomb.

In the delirium of his fever he seemed to see all the victims of his cruelty, terrifying and admonitory,

threatening him and calling to the most just God for justice. In vain he tossed upon his bed of sickness, he could not find relief.

Summoning Teofan, the Metropolitan, the Bishops and boyars, he informed them that he felt the end of his life to be approaching ; he humbled himself, and implored pardon for all the wrong he had done. Finally, he begged for consideration for his son, Bogdan, to whom he left the throne of the realm if they would assist him. Being of tender years, and surrounded by powerful enemies, he would be unable to protect either himself or his country unless the boyars preserved unity among themselves and affection and loyalty to the Ruler.

"As for myself," he proceeded to say, "if I recover from this sickness, I am determined to become a monk in the Monastery of Slatina, where I may repent for the rest of the days that it pleases God to leave me. Therefore, I beseech you, Fathers, when you see me at the point of death to shave me like a monk——"

He was not able to say much more. He was seized with convulsions, and a terrible coma like death itself stiffened his body, so that the Metropolitan and the Bishops, believing him to be expiring, canonized him, bestowing upon him the name of Paisie after that of Peter, which name he had borne previous to becoming Prince. After this they paid homage to the Princess Rucsanda as regent during

the minority of her son, and proclaimed Bogdan king.

Immediately after they sent envoys to all the boyars within the country and to the exiles, and to the captains of the army.

The twilight was approaching when Stroici and Spancioc arrived.

Dismounting at an inn, they approached the castle with haste. The town was silent and dreary like some gigantic tomb. Only the murmuring waters of the Dniester were audible as they continually washed the slopes of the grey bare banks, and the monotonous cry of the sentries who examined each other by the evening light along the length of their lances. Pursuing their way into the palace, they experienced no small surprise at meeting no one ; at last a lacquey showed them the sick man's room. As they were about to enter they heard a loud noise, and paused to listen.

Lapushneanu was rousing from his lethargy. Upon opening his eyes he saw two monks standing, the one at his head, and the other at his feet, motionless, like two statues of bronze ; he glanced at himself, and found himself clothed in the habit of a monk ; round his head was a cowl. He tried to raise his hand, but was prevented by the strings of a rosary. It seemed to him as though he dreamed, and he closed his eyes again ; but opening them once more after a little while he saw the same things, the rosary, the cowl, the monks.

"How are you feeling now, Brother Paisie?" one of the monks asked him, seeing that he was not sleeping.

This name brought back to his mind all that had taken place. His blood began to boil and half raising himself he cried:

"What are these? Ah, you are making fun of me! Avaunt, foul creatures! Go, or I will murder you all!"

He sought a weapon with his hand, but finding nothing but the cowl he flung it with his hand at the head of one of the monks.

At the sound of his shouting, the Princess, with her son, the Metropolitan, the boyars and servants, all entered the room.

Meanwhile the other two boyars arrived and stood by the door listening.

"Ah, you wanted to turn me into a monk," cried Lapushneanu in a raucous and terrible voice. "You thought to get rid of me? But you can dismiss that idea! God or the devil will make me well again, and——"

"Unhappy man, do not blaspheme," said the Metropolitan, cutting him short. "Do not forget you are in the hour of death! Reflect, sinful man, that you are a monk, you are no longer Ruler! Reflect that such ravings and yells are frightening this innocent woman, and this child in whom rests the hope of Moldavia."

"Infernal hypocrite!" added the sick man,

endeavouring to rise from his bed. "Hold your tongue ; it was I who made you Metropolitan, and I unfrock you. You tried to make me a priest but I will put that right. There are many I will make into priests. But as for that bitch, I will cut her into four pieces with her pup so that they may never again listen to the advice of hypocrites or to my enemies. He lies who says I am a monk. I am no monk—I am Ruler. I am Alexandru Voda! Help! Help! Where are my soldiers? Fetch them! Fetch them all! I will command them. Kill all these people. Let none escape. Ah! I am choking! Water! Water! Water!" And he fell back exhausted, gasping with excitement and fury.

The Princess and the Metropolitan retired. At the door they came face to face with Stroici and Spancioc.

"Madam," said Spancioc, seizing Rucsanda's hand, "that man must die at all costs. See this powder, pour it into his drink."

"Poison," she cried with a shudder.

"Poison!" pursued Spancioc. "Unless this man dies at once, the lives of your Highness and your son are in danger. The father has lived long enough and done enough. Let the father die that the son may live."

A servant came out of the room.

"What is it?" asked the Princess.

"The sick man has roused and asks for water

and his son. He bade me not to return without him."

"Oh, they wish to kill him," groaned the wretched mother, pressing her son passionately to her breast.

"There is not time for hesitation, Madam," added Spancioc. "Think of the wife of Voda Shtefanitza and choose between father and son."

"What say you, Father?" said the poor woman, turning towards the Metropolitan, with her eyes full of tears.

"This man is cruel and fierce, my daughter; may the Lord God give you counsel. As for me, I go to prepare for our departure with our new Ruler; for our late Prince, may God pardon him, and also forgive you."

With these words the holy Teofan departed.

Rucsanda took a silver cup full of water, which was handed to her by the servant, and then, amid the entreaties and arguments of the boyars, poured the poison into it. The boyars pushed her into the sick man's room.

"What is he doing?" asked Spancioc of Stroici, who pushed open the door again and looked in.

"He asks for his son—he says he wishes him to come to him—he asks for a drink—the Princess trembles—she gives him the cup—he will not take it!"

Spancioc starts and draws his dagger from his belt.

"But yes, he takes it, he drinks. May it do your Highness good!"

Rucsanda emerged shaking and livid, and supporting herself against the wall.

"You must render account before God," she said, sighing, "for you have caused me to commit this sin."

The Metropolitan arrived.

"Let us go," he said to the Princess.

"But who will tend to this wretched man?"

"We will," replied the boyars.

"Oh, Father, what have you made me do!" said the Princess to the Metropolitan, and she went sobbing with him.

The two boyars went into the sick man. The poison had not yet begun to do its work. Lapushneanu lay stretched out, his face uppermost, calm but very weak. When the two boyars entered, he looked at them for some time, but not recognizing them he asked who they were, and what they had to say.

"I am Stroici," replied one.

"And I am Spancioc," added the other, "and our wish is to see you before you die as we promised you."

"Oh, my enemies!" sighed Alexandru.

"I am Spancioc," continued that person, "Spancioc whom you would fain have beheaded when you murdered the forty-seven boyars, and who escaped from your clutches! Spancioc, whose

property you have destroyed leaving his wife and children to beg for alms at the doors of Christian houses."

"Ah, I feel as though a fire burnt me!" cried the sick man, grasping his stomach with both hands.

"To-day we free ourselves, for you must die. The poison works."

"Oh, you have poisoned me, infamous creatures! Oh, what a fire! Where is the Princess? Where is my son?"

"They have gone away and left you to us."

"They have gone away and left me! Have left me to you! Oh, kill me and let me escape from suffering. Oh, stab me, you are still young, have pity, free me from the agony that rends me, stab me!" he said, and turned towards Stroici.

"I will not desecrate my noble dagger with the blood of such a worthless tyrant as you."

The pains increased. The poisoned man writhed in convulsions.

"Oh," he cried, "my very soul burns me! Oh, give me water—give me something to drink."

"Look," said Spancioc, taking the silver cup from the table, "the dregs of the poison are left. Drink and quench your thirst!"

"Nay, nay, I will not," said the sick man, setting his teeth.

Then Stroici seized him and held him tight while Spancioc, drawing a knife from its sheath, unclenched his teeth with its point and poured down his throat

the poison which had remained at the bottom of the cup.

Lapushneanu, roaring like a bull which sees the hand and axe which is about to strike him, tried to turn his face towards the wall.

"What, you do not want to see us?" said the boyars. "No, but it is meet that you should see in us your punishment; learn to die, you who have only known how to kill." And seizing him both together, they held him inflexibly, staring at him with devilish delight and reviling him.

The unhappy Prince writhed in spasms of agony, he foamed at the mouth, he gnashed his teeth, and his bloodshot eyes protruded out of his head; an icy sweat, sad forerunner of death, broke out in drops upon his brow. After a torture of half an hour, he finally yielded up the ghost in the hands of his judges.

Such was the end of Alexandru Lapushneanu, who leaves a bloody page in the history of Moldavia.

A portrait of himself and his family may be seen to this day in the Monastery at Slatina, which he built, and where he is buried.

ZIDRA

By M. Beza

WE were talking in the inn at Grabova and passing round the wine without troubling ourselves as to the lateness of the hour. In time we began to sing—as it is the custom to sing in these parts. One raises his voice, while the others subdue theirs, till all take up the chorus :

Your head lies in my pouch,
Zidra, mighty Zidra !

Only our friend, Mitu Dola, was silent ; he was much moved and kept turning first to one side and then to the other.

" Oh, that song ! " he gasped when we stopped. Then suddenly to me : " Do you know who Zidra was ? And do you know who killed Zidra ? "

He took up his mug, drank from it several times, and then, with a brain clouded by distant memories and the strong wine, he began to tell me the story :

" It must be some thirty years ago. Zidra was

then a haiduk in the Smolcu mountains. What a man! There was a heavy price upon his head. His very name, passed from mouth to mouth, brought a wave of fear. And we children would gather together in the evening under the eaves of the fountains, by the church doors, and talk of Zidra. This much we knew: at one time he had lived amongst us and then had unexpectedly disappeared from the village; on account of some murder everybody said. After a long time he appeared again, robbing a long way this side of Smolcu: 'Zidra is at Seven-Hills; Zidra is in the Vigla Forest.'

"Whispering thus secretly, we would glance over our shoulders. We would shiver as though we could feel a cold breath from the dark thicket whence Zidra might appear. I pictured him just like my father, probably because my father, too, was a striking figure. In a coat with long flowing sleeves, his cap on one side, and his belt loaded with pistols, my father—like all tax-gatherers at that period—was on the road a great deal of his time, so that my mother and I remained alone for weeks on end.

"We had a house just on the outskirts of the village surrounded by a beech wood, the shadows of which hung darkly above our heads. How it would begin to moan at night! The rustling of the leaves, the prolonged roar of the rocking trees was like some great waterfall. From our soft bed, clasped in my mother's arms, I listened to the fierce

din. From time to time it ceased ; then, through the silence, came the sound of whistling, of shots, of the trampling of horses and of men.

"I sighed with terror. 'Mother, supposing robbers should attack us.' 'Hush ! It is unlucky to speak of such things.' 'You know, mother, Zidra is in Vigla Forest.' When I first mentioned this name my mother trembled and started back, but quickly coming forward she said hastily and with unusual anxiety : 'Who told you this ?' 'Cousin Gushu, mother. Gushu's father, mother, saw a host of vultures over Vigla Forest circling round.'

"My mother repeated in a puzzled way: 'Vultures circling round——' Then, after thinking a moment, she said to herself: 'That is it ; that is where he halted and had his food—the vultures are attracted by the smell.'

"My father, arriving a few days later, said the same thing, while he added that some shepherds had also seen Zidra. My mother was delicate, her features bore the melancholy expression of some hidden sorrow. She looked wan and remained staring into space. 'Eh ? What ?' said my father sternly. 'Why should I be afraid of Zidra ?'

"He closed the conversation. But into our house there crept an unexplained disquietude—something intangible, blowing like an icy breath that made my mother shudder. How could I understand then ? Time alone has given me the explanation of it all. And to-day when I think

of the spot where this dark mystery unfolded itself old scenes and things emerge from oblivion and stand vividly before me. I see the yard of our house with the door opening into the wood, the staircase leading into the bedroom ; here is the hearth and along the walls are the great wooden cupboards. Sitting upon the corner-seat by the fire my mother spun at her wheel—often she would start to spin but seemed as though she could not. She would constantly stop, her thoughts were elsewhere. And if I asked her anything, she would nod her head without listening to me. Only when, amid the loud rustle of the trees, I would mention Zidra she would turn quickly, her eyes wide open, and say with a shiver : 'Zidra ?' 'Yes, mother.'

"And when night fell she would try the doors one after the other. She would walk up and down, a pine-torch in her hand, passing through visions of horror, and with her went the smoking flame which rose and fell as it struggled with the shadows, moving upon the ceilings and floors and on the walls of the room where the sofa was, where it lit up for a second the hanging weapons : an old musket, two scimitars, some pistols.

"Sometimes there was a pleasant silence over everything. The wood slept, the country, too, was asleep. Then, in the light of the little icon-lamp, could be heard the gentle hum of the spinning-wheel, murmuring like a golden beetle in a fairy-tale, lulling me till I slept.

"During one of these nights—the wheel stopped and I heard my mother saying: 'Tuesday at Custur, Wednesday at Lehova, Thursday—Thursday——' She knew where my father usually stayed and was calculating.

"Becoming confused she began again from the beginning: 'Tuesday at Custur, Wednesday at Lehova, Thursday—Thursday on the road.' And she rose. She went to the lamp to pour in oil that it might burn till the daylight. In the meantime a noise came from the yard and was repeated more loudly. 'Mother, some one is knocking!' 'Who could be knocking?' she murmured.

"After a moment of indecision she went downstairs. Unintelligible words followed—a man's voice, the door was shaken. My mother began to speak gently, inaudibly. Soon everything was silent again. By my side I could hear my mother's breath, coming short and with difficulty, but her tongue remained tied. When she recovered herself she said suddenly: 'Can I? How can I open? I am married. I cannot.' 'To whom, mother—to whom must you open?' She took me tremblingly in her arms, squeezed me to her, and pressed her burning cheek against mine. 'You are too little. You do not understand, my treasure!'

"And, after a while, talking more to herself, while the tears flowed slowly down her cheeks: 'At the fountain in Plaiu—it is long ago. We pledged our word—at dusk—God saw us; and in

the end he made off one day, and I waited for him —years and years I waited. Now what does he want? I am married. What does he expect? Why did he come?'

"Thus much I remember. I fell asleep close to my mother. The next day she might just have got up after a long illness so white was she in the face, with fear shining in her eyes. When my father saw her he raised the thick bushy eyebrows which gave such a harsh appearance to his hairy face. 'There is something wrong, something has happened.'

"Could she deny it? They went into the room where the sofa stood, and soon after my father broke out with: 'From henceforth either I or he!' And he stormed about, taking long heavy strides while the weapons clattered on the wall. He swore, and added with a wild burst of laughter: 'Ha, ha! And the head and two hundred ducats!'

"From now on he no longer took the road; he remained on guard. Spies began to move about. Fierce-looking men knocked at the door. My father went out, exchanged some rapid words with them, among which could be continually heard the name of Zidra, and they disappeared. But what were those cries, those sharp whistles through the night? Often, too, across the hillocks came the sound of stones—stones striking one against the other, and my father replied in the same way. And the knocking sounds rose sonorous, ringing through the darkness as though some strange birds

were rattling their beaks. I heard it in my sleep and shuddered. 'Have no fear,' whispered my mother, 'it is nothing, my dear one. Your father is talking—with some sentries.'

"A few weeks passed thus, until one midnight there appeared in the further room four men in black cloaks, carrying guns; they seemed to have sprung out of the ground. They shook hands and without a moment's pause began moving about in the ruddy, uncertain light of the pine-torch. In the silence outside—a silence caused by the fog which deadened all sound—their words could be overheard. As my father slung his scimitar over his shoulder, one of them said in a loud clear voice: 'At Sticótur, in the monastery.' 'Since when?' 'Since dinner-time to-day—he is eating and drinking.' 'The man is caught,' said another. 'He can't escape this time.'

"They went out quickly; they were lost in the black darkness which began to vibrate with the rising of the wind. The bushes rattled and bent beneath the rain—storms of rain beat and splashed against the window-panes, a sea of sound, storm after storm."

Here, as far as I can remember, Mitu Dola brought the story to a close. I asked:

"How did it end?"

"Didn't you hear the song? My father took the head and put it in his pouch. As he said, 'and the head and two hundred ducats.'"

GARDANA

By M. Beza

MITU TEGA returned to the house much annoyed. As he entered his wife asked him :

"Well, has he not turned up yet ?"

"No, not to-day either."

"This is what happens when you rely on an unknown man, a stranger. Suppose he never comes. God forbid that he should go off with the whole herd !"

Tega did not reply. He sat motionless in the silent veranda, which gradually grew dark with shadows of the evening mist, and pondered. Of course such things did happen ; he might have taken the goats and gone off, in which case let him find him who can ! Where could one look for him ? Whither could one follow him ?

And as he meditated thus he seemed to see the shepherd before his eyes ; he called to mind the first day he had seen him ; a terrible man, like a wild man from the woods, with a great moustache

lost in a hard, black beard, which left only his eyes and cheek-bones visible. He came into him, and without looking him in the face, said :

"I have heard—some people told me that you want a man to tend the bucks. Take me, I am a shepherd."

Tega gave him one look, he was just the kind of man he wanted. He asked him :

"Where do you come from ?"

"I come—well, from Blatza. Toli—Toli the shepherd — I have been with many other goat owners."

Tega looked at him again, considered a little, and said :

"Good, I'll take you ; may you prove honest, for, look, many a man has cheated me, and many a man has stolen from me up to now."

And so he engaged him. Toli stayed with Tega, and no one could have conducted himself better.

A month later they went together to the Salonica district, where they bought goats, over eight hundred head. When it was time to return, Tega—for fear of attack by brigands—went ahead secretly, leaving Toli to follow on alone with the herd. The days slipped by—one week, two—Toli did not put in an appearance. What could have happened ? Many ideas passed through Tega's brain. Especially after what his wife had said. At night he could not sleep. He dozed for a while, and then woke

again, with his mind on the shepherd, tormenting himself, until the crowing of the cocks heralded the dawn. Then he got up; and, as he was short and plump, he took a staff in his hand, and proceeded to the nearest hill whence could be seen the country opening out as flat as the palm of a hand.

At that hour the first blush of dawn glowed in the east. And slowly, slowly rose the sun. Round, purple, fiery, it lit first the crests of the mountains, then flashed its rays into the heart of the valleys; the window-panes in the village suddenly caught the fiery light; the birds began to fly; on the ground, among the glistening dew, flowers raised their heads out of the fresh grass, a wealth of daisies and buttercups like little goblets of gold. But Mitu Tega had no time for such things. His eyes were searching the landscape. Something was moving yonder —a cloud of dust.

"The herd, it is the herd!" murmured Tega.

He could hear the light, soft tinkle of the bells, sounding melodiously in the spring morning. And see, see—the herd drew near, the bell-carrier in front, two dogs with them, and last of all the shepherd with his cloak round his shoulder.

"Welcome," cried Tega with all his heart. "But, Toli, you have tarried a long while. I was beginning to wonder——"

"What would you, I did not come direct, I had to go round."

The bucks played around, a fine, picked lot with

silky hair, they roamed about, and Tega felt as though he, too, could skip about, could take the shepherd in his arms, and embrace him for sheer joy.

As in other years, Tega kept the herd on the neighbouring slopes, on the Aitosh hills. It was Toli's business to get the bread, salt, and all that was needed, and once every two or three days, leaving the herd in the care of a comrade, he would take his way to his employer's house. Usually Tega's wife would be spinning at her wheel when he went in.

"Good day!"

"Welcome, Toli," the woman said pleasantly. "Tega is not at home at present, but sit down, Toli, sit down, and wait till he comes."

The shepherd took off his cloak, and did not say another word.

The veranda where they were sitting was upstairs; through the open windows the eye could follow the distant view; the hills lay slumbering in the afternoon light, along their foot lay a road—processions of laden mules, whole caravans ascending slowly and laboriously, winding along in bluish lines till lost to sight over the brow of the hill. The woman followed them with her eyes, and without moving from her wheel, pointing with her hand, she said:

"There are sheepfolds yonder, too, aren't there?"

The shepherd nodded his head.

"I never asked you, Toli, how are the goats

doing? Do you think my man chose well this year?"

"Well, very well."

That was all. He said no more. His deep-set eyes were sad, and black as the night. A minute later footsteps sounded in the garden, and then the voice of a neighbour:

"Where are you, dear, where have you hidden yourself?"

"Here, Lena, here," replied the woman upstairs.

Lena mounted the stairs. Behind her came Doda Sili and Mia; they had all brought their work, for they would not go away till late in the evening.

"Have you heard?" asked Lena.

"What?"

"Two more murders."

Suspicion had fallen upon Gardana. He had become a kind of vampire about whom many tales were told. Especially old men, if they could engage you in conversation, would try and impress you with the story.

In a village lived a maiden, modest and very beautiful. She was small, of the same age as Gardana, who was a boy then. They were fond of each other, they played together, they kissed each other—they kissed as children kiss. But after a while the girl's form took on the soft curves of coming womanhood; then it came to pass that they

never kissed each other, they knew not why, and when they were alone they did not venture to look into each other's eyes ; she would blush like a ripe apple, and Gardana's lips would tremble. Then there appeared upon the scene, from somewhere, a certain Dina, son of a rich somebody ; the girl pleased him, and he sent her an offer of marriage. Her father did not think twice, her father gave her to him.

And Gardana—would you believe it—after he realized that it was hard fact, gnashed his teeth, beat his breast, and disappeared. Two days later he was on the mountains, and a gang with him.

Eh ! love knows no bounds, love builds, but love also destroys many homes.

The girl's father was seized and murdered ; not long after Dina was murdered too. Then Gardana spread terror for many years in succession.

For some time now, whatever he might have been doing, wherever he might be in hiding, nothing had been heard of him. But as soon as something happened, his name once again passed round the village : " Gardana, it is Gardana ! "

Perhaps it was not he, perhaps he had left the mountains, perhaps even he was dead ; but the people who knew something——

" How many did you say there were ? " asked Mia.

" Two ; both merchants. They came from abroad."

"And who can have murdered them?"

"No one but—Gardana."

"How is it? But is Gardana still alive?"

"Come, do you think he really is dead? No, no, they alone give this kind of tidings of themselves."

"And why?"

"They have to be on their guard, the bailiffs are after them, they might capture them."

"Perhaps——"

The spinning-wheel spun on. The spool wound the thread, the treadle hummed, filling the room with a soothing noise.

Doda Sili said wonderingly:

"Who knows what kind of man he is?"

"Gardana?"

"Gardana."

"Not a very big man, but large enough to terrify one, with a black beard—oh, so black!—and, when you least expect it, there he is on your road, just as though he had sprung out of the ground. Didn't our Toli once meet him!"

"How was that?"

The spinning-wheel stopped suddenly. A swarm of gnats came in through the windows, and buzzed round in the warmth of the sun; and Lena said quietly:

"It was on his way from the sheepfold; he came upon Gardana on the Padea-Murgu."

"Oh, it might have been somebody else."

"It was he, he himself, with that beard, those garments——"

And so the conversation continued. Toli, the shepherd, took no part in the talk. He sat over on the floor, silent, impassive—like a moss-grown stone. Only occasionally he raised his bushy eyebrows, and a troubled, misty look shone in his eyes. Tega's wife wondered to herself, she could not understand him; really, what was the matter with him? He was brave, she knew he had not his equal for courage, when he had charge of the herd not an animal was ever lost; all the same, what a man he was, always frowning, and never a smile on his lips! There must be something with him, naturally it must be—— And breaking off her train of thought she suddenly spoke to him.

"Toli, during all the months you have been with us I have never asked you whether you are married?"

The question was unexpected. The shepherd seemed to be considering. Then he answered:

"No."

"What? You have never married? Have you no wife, no home?"

"Home—ah!" he sighed. "You are right, even I once had a home, even I had hopes of a bride, but they came to nought—what would you, it was not written in the book of destiny—I was poor."

He spoke haltingly, and his eyes wandered here

and there. And after one motion of his hand, as though to say "I have much sorrow in my heart," he added:

"That girl is dead—and I, too, shall die, everything will die."

. . . . .

One afternoon in March, as the shepherd did not appear, Mitu Tega prepared to go alone to the fold. He brought out the horse, bought two bags of bread, and a lamb freshly killed, went to the mill where he procured some barley, and then on slowly, quietly—he on foot, the horse in front—till he reached his destination just as the sun was disappearing behind the Aitosh mountains.

The shepherds rubbed their eyes when they saw him, but he called out:

"I have brought a lamb for roasting."

"You must eat it with us," said Toli, "and stay the night here."

"No, for they expect me at home."

"Will you start back at this hour?" put in Panu, Toli's comrade. "The night brings many perils."

It was getting quite dark. Stars twinkled. Whether he wished to or not, Mitu Tega was obliged to remain. Then the shepherds set to work; one put the lamb on to the spit, and lit the fire; the other fetched boughs from the wood. He brought whole branches with which they prepared a shelter for the night for Tega—within was a

bed of green bracken. Then all three stretched themselves by the fire. Gradually the flames sank a little, on the heap of live coals the lamb began to brown, and spit with fat, and send out an appetizing smell. The moon shone through the bushes; they seemed to move beneath the hard, cold light which flooded the solitude. The shadows of the mountains stretched away indefinitely. Above, some night birds crossed unseen, flapping their wings. Mîtu Tega turned his head. For a moment his glance was arrested: by Toli's side, a gun and a long scimitar lay shining on the ground. He was not nervous, otherwise—— He glanced at Toli.

"What a man!" thought Tega. "I have nothing to fear while I am with him."

They began to eat, quickly and hungrily, tearing the meat with their fingers, not speaking a word. Toli picked up the shoulder-bone of the lamb, and drew near the fire, to scrutinize it, for some omen for the future.

"What's the matter?" Tega asked.

"Nothing—only it seems to me—that there is blood everywhere, that blood pursues. Look, and you, too, Panu."

"There is," murmured Panu, "a little blood, one can see a spot, two red patches."

The hours passed. The dogs started off towards the woods. From their bark there might be dangerous men on the move. Toli listened a moment, took his gun, and said quickly to Tega:

"Have you any weapon about you?"

"I have—a pistol."

"Take it out, and go in there, and do not move. But you, Panu, get more over there—not near the fire, move into the shadow."

He had scarcely finished speaking before the brigands were upon them. They came stealthily through the bushes, avoiding the moonlight, but the shepherd saw them, and without waiting fired a chance shot.

"Don't shoot, don't shoot!" cried the robbers.

A great noise arose—the flock scattered, the barking of the dogs became gradually more and more excited; there was another report, and yet another. Toli's gun gave a dull sound and was followed by several cries:

"You will kill us all like this, all——"

"Down with your arms, lay down your arms!" cried Toli.

"Look, man, we are putting them down; only don't shoot."

"Drop them!"

Toli's voice thundered. His voice alone was enough to make one tremble.

The brigands threw down their arms, and advanced. There were three of them. One was quite a young man, about thirty-five years of age, with a worn face, and very pale. Blood was flowing from one foot and clotting on to his white gaiters as it flowed. Toli went up to him and said:

"I have wounded you—have I wounded you?"

The brigand did not reply. Toli crossed his arms and shaking his head asked:

"Was it me you meant to rob? Was it me you meant to attack? Do you know who I am?"

They looked into each other's eyes, they stared at each other—deep into each other's eyes they gazed. Each one was thinking: "Where have I seen him before?" for they had surely known each other somewhere. Vague memories of their past life, of bygone years began to stir, and gradually recollection dawned.

"Gardana," said the brigand, "is it you?"

Mitu Tega was startled. He shivered as though iced water were being poured down his back. Who had uttered that name? Where was Gardana? He was thunder-struck by what followed: Toli and the robbers shook hands, embraced each other and conversed with each other.

"Gardana, Gardana, I thought you were dead—they told me you had died, Gardana!"

"No, brother," said Toli. "It might have been better if I had died."

Then after a short pause:

"But you are in pain, brother; I have hurt you—look, you were within an ace of being killed, brother Manole, and I should have had another man's soul, and another man's blood upon my head. There, you were nearly killed. What brought you, what drew you within range of my gun? Within

an ace, brother Manole—another man's soul, another man's blood——"

For the first time for many years he seemed moved with self-pity. He tore a strip from his shirt, bent over Manole, and dressed his wound. The others watched, amazed. The waters were sleeping, the forests were sleeping. From the trees, from the valleys, from the grass, came voices murmuring in the silence of the night, soft, remote, a sort of breath, more like a sigh from the sleeping earth. Manole spoke :

"Do you remember, Gardana? We were on the Baitan mountains, you know—at Piatra-de-Furca —we were together when the bailiffs hemmed us in on all sides—a host of them. We held our own till nightfall. Eh! and then I saw what stuff Gardana was made of! You gave us one call and went straight ahead—we after you, and so we escaped, we cut our way through with our scimitars. Then, when the trumpets gave the alarm, and the guns began to go off, I lost sight of you, Gardana ; we were all scattered, I remained alone in the valley under Piatra-de-Furca. Do you remember? It must be five years, more—six years ago. Where are all our comrades now?"

"Our comrades—they have gone away, I let them go. Brother Manole, heavy curses lie on my head—enough to crush me, brother. I was not a bad man. You know how many times I went to Dina. I said : 'Don't drive me too far, bethink

yourself.' And I went to the girl's father. But you see Dina was rich, Dina had flocks of sheep. And her father gave her to him without asking whether the girl loved him. And after that, tell me, brother, could I sit patiently by, bite my nails and say nothing? Could I?"

Toli Gardana ceased speaking. After a moment of reflection he added softly:

"But the girl faded away—she died of grief and disappointment. One day the earth will cover me too, our bodies may rot anywhere, and no one will weep—not a tear, they will all rejoice. I don't know, brother, but since that girl died it seems to me I am not the man I was. I wanted to kill myself, I roamed about here, and one day I went to Tega. I was strong—I gave out that I came from Blatza, and that I was a shepherd; who was he that he should know differently! But you, brother, how has the world treated you?"

"Harshly, Gardana. I was shut up in Tricol for three years. Prison cut me off from life. For months I dug—with hands and nails I dug—until one night, during a storm, I broke through the wall and escaped with these two companions. And when I found myself back among these mountains my thoughts turned to you. I had heard you were dead, Gardana; but see what has happened, and how it has come to pass, how fate brings these things about, brother Gardana . . . it is not a month since I escaped. . . ."

Before they were aware of it the shadows of the night began to melt away. The brigands ceased to speak as though they feared the signs of the coming day. They remained silent, their heads upon the ground in the face of the glory of the flaming dawn.

Toli Gardana asked :

" Where are you going now ? "

" How should we know ? No matter where. There are many forests."

THE DEAD POOL

By M. Beza

WE seemed to be between Mount Gramos and Mount Deniscu. I guessed it to be so from the peaks, which showed like some fancies of the night, keeping steadfast watch in the moonlight; the moon we could not see, we could only feel her floating over us. The pale light shone only in the ether above, and gradually diminished till it was lost to the eyes in a mass of shadows; they fell like curtains, enveloping us, dense, black. The silence extended indefinitely; it was as though the world here had remained unchanged since its creation. Hardly a breath of wind reached us. It always carried with it at this spot the same odour of dank weeds, of plants with poisonous juices; everything told of the neighbourhood of water—not fresh water, but water asleep for centuries.

"Can you see the pool?" questioned my companion, Ghicu Sina; and then he added: "It is hidden, certainly, but look with attention."

I looked, and after a time, getting accustomed to the darkness, I, too, got the impression of something shining and smooth.

"The pool——"

"Only the pool? Some lights too?"

"That is so," I whispered with a shudder.

There on the surface of the water were flickering points of fire. They could not come from above, they were not glow-worms, or sparks such as one sees passing over graves.

Ghicu Sina spoke:

"They are reflections, the lights are burning in the pool."

With the fear that seizes us in the presence of the supernatural, I asked:

"What induced us to stay here?"

"Where else could we stop? There are no sheep-folds in these parts, formerly there were such, but since the death of the Spirit who guarded the mountains, none of them remain."

After a pause he said slowly:

"You have heard of dead pools?" He stood immersed in thought. "This is a dead pool. I will tell you about it.

"Once upon a time, when the trees were bursting into leaf, this district was full of sheep. Flock after flock passed through, handled by sturdy shepherds, well known in their own neighbourhood. Then one spring-tide a stranger showed his face,

beautiful as a god, wearing upon his shoulders a cloak as white as snow. Every one wondered, 'Who may he be, and whence does he come?' Many tales passed round until the mystery began to unravel itself. In the valley of the Tempe, so runs the story, whither he had wandered with the sheep, he fell in love with the beautiful Virghea. Mad with love, when the family made the winter-move, he followed her to the mountains; he came with a comrade and wandered about till he settled his sheep-fold here, in these parts.

"Ah! where had the fame of this Virghea of Gramuste not reached! All the beauties of nature seemed to have bestowed some gift upon her: the blue of heaven—the colour of her eyes; the shadow of the woods—the mystery of their liquid depths; the setting sun—the gold of her soft hair; the springs—the tone of her silvery laugh. Attracted by such charms every youth fell at the feet of Virghea. But she did not care; only when her eyes rested on the shepherd did her youthful being fill with a burning desire.

"Now day after day from the high ground about the sheep-fold could be heard the sound of a flute; heard in the stillness of the dusk it roused strange longings in the girl's breast. Then she would steal out of the house, and the shepherd himself would come down towards Gramuste.

"About this time, there broke loose such a storm as had never been seen before. The peaks began

to rattle as though the mountains were changing places, striking each other with noise like thunder. Thus it continued for three days. Only on the fourth day, late in the evening, could the shepherd leave the fold: he had taken only a few steps when —what a sight met his eyes by the side of the pool! A big fire, and round it a shadowy form. And suddenly the phantom spoke with hand pointing to the spit which he held above the heap of burning coals: 'The heart of the Spirit of Deniscu.'

"In a flash the shepherd realized the meaning of the hurricane of the last few days. The guardian Spirits of the mountains had striven together, and one had been overthrown. The shadow continued to speak: 'Turn this spit that I may rest a while. Taste not of the heart, for if you touch it you will immediately die.'

"The shadow fell into a profound slumber.

"By the side of the fire the shepherd looked fearfully on all sides. Far off, in the pale blue sky, a star broke away; it fell with a long tail of fire, and went out. 'Some one will die,' sighed the shepherd. The words of the Spirit flashed through his mind. 'H'm!' he said. 'If I taste, perhaps the contrary is true, who knows?' So thinking, he put his finger on the heart on the spit and carried it to his mouth. The sensation was unspeakably pleasant. He laughed; then quickly ate the whole heart. Immediately there rose within him a cruel

passion towards the sleeping Spirit ; upon the spot he killed it and took the heart. At once there came to him the strength of a giant, the ground began to tremble beneath his footsteps, while aerial voices, and voices from the water, sounded round him. Creatures never seen before emerged from the pool ; linked together by their white hands they danced round in whirling circles. Thus changed, he reached his comrade at the fold, and tried to explain, but his thoughts were elsewhere, and his voice sounded as though from another world. He finished with broken words : 'The water calls me—tell no one what has happened to me—take my flute : if danger threatens come to the pool and sing to me.'

"During the evenings that followed Virghea saw naught of the shepherd, and she wondered at not seeing him, expecting him from day to day. So days passed that seemed like weeks, and weeks seemed months, and they went by without any news of him till the poor maiden took to her bed from grief. Then the comrade of the hills remembered the shepherd's words. He came at midnight to the side of the pool and sang—a long time he sang. Towards dawn, when the strains of the flute died away, there came from Gramuste the sound of two strokes of a bell, then another two, and others in succession, mournful, prolonged. The echoes answered back, as though other bells were ringing in other places, resounding from hill to hill until

they reached the bottom of the pool, and after a time, to the voice of the bells were joined real words, sobbing to the rhythm: 'Virghea is dead—is dead!'"

Ghicu Sina paused a while. Although he had only told me these things quite briefly, I felt their secret had entered my soul; with my eyes upon the pool where the strange reflections constantly played, I seemed to hear, as one sometimes hears the faint voice of memory from a remote past, the sound of the bells and their metallic words: "Virghea is dead—is dead!"

And then, the story adds, he rose from the pool. Like the wind, he raised her in his arms and carried her deep down to his translucent palace where, to this day, little fiery points of light burn round the head of the dead woman.

OLD NICHIFOR, THE IMPOSTOR

By I. Creanga

OLD NICHIFOR is not a character out of a story-book but a real man like other men ; he was once, when he was alive, an inhabitant of the Tzutzuen quarter of the town of Neamtzu, towards the village of Neamtzu Vinatori.

When old Nichifor lived in Tzutzuen my grandfather's grandfather was piper at the christening feast at the house of Mosh Dedui from Vinatori, the great Ciubar-Voda being godfather, to whom Mosh Dedui gave forty-nine brown lambs with only one eye each ; and the priest, uncle of my mother's uncle, was Ciubuc the Bell-ringer from the Neamtzu Monastery, who put up a big bell at this same monastery at his own expense, and had a fancy to ring it all by himself on big feast days, on which account he was called the bell-ringer. About this time old Nichifor lived at Tzutzuen.

Old Nichifor was a cab-driver. Although his carriage was only fastened together with thongs

of lime and bark, it was still a good carriage, roomy and comfortable. A hood of matting prevented the sun and rain from beating down into old Nichifor's carriage. In the well of the carriage hung a grease box with a greasing stick and some screws which banged against each other ding ! dong ! ding ! dong ! whenever the carriage moved. On a hook below the boot—on the left—was suspended a little axe to be ready for any emergency.

Two mares, white as snow and swift as flame, nearly always supported the pole of the carriage ; nearly always but not quite always ; old Nichifor was a horse-dealer, and when he got the chance he would either exchange or sell a mare in the middle of a journey, and in that case the pole would be bare on the one side. The old man liked to have young, well-bred mares ; it was a weakness with him. Perhaps you will ask me why mares and always white ones, and I will tell you this : mares, because old Nichifor liked to breed from them, white, because the whiteness of the mares, he said, served him as a lantern on the road at nights.

Old Nichifor was not among those who do not know that " It is not good to be coachman behind white horses or the slave of women ; " he knew this, but the mares were his own, and when he took care of them they were taken care of and when he did not—well, there was no one to reproach him. Old Nichifor avoided carrier's work ; he refused to do any lifting for fear of giving himself a rupture.

"Cab driving," he said, "is much better; one has to deal with live goods who go up hill on foot, and down hill on foot, and only stay in the carriage when it halts."

Old Nichifor had a whip of hemp twig, plaited by his own hand, with a silk lash, which he cracked loud enough to deafen you. And whether he had a full load or was empty, old Nichifor always walked up the hills and usually pulled together with the mares. Down the hills he walked to avoid laming the mares.

The passengers, willing or unwilling, had to do the same, for they had enough of old Nichifor's tongue, who once rounded on one of them like this: "Can't you get out and walk; the horse is not like a blockhead that talks." If you only knew how to appreciate everything that fell from old Nichifor's mouth, he was very witty. If he met a rider on the road, he would ask: "Left the Prince far behind, warrior?" and then, all at once, he would whip up the mares, saying:

"White for the leader, white for the wheeler,
The pole lies bare on the one side.
Heigh! It's not far to Galatz. Heigh!"

But if he met women and young girls then he sang a knowing song, rather like this:

"When I took my old wife
Eight lovers did sigh:
Three women already wed,
And five girls, in one village."

They say, moreover, that one could not take the road, especially in the month of May, with a pleasanter or gayer man. Only sometimes, when you pretended not to see you were passing the door of a public house, because you did not feel inclined to soften old Nichifor's throat, did you find him in a bad mood, but even on these occasions he would drive rapidly from one inn to the other. On one occasion, especially, old Nichifor coveted two mares which were marvels on the road, but at the inns, whether he wanted to or no, they used to halt, for he had bought them from a priest.

My father said that some old men, who had heard it from old Nichifor's own lips, had told him that at that time it was a good business being a cab-driver in Neamtzu town. You drove from Varatic to Agapia, from Agapia to Varatic, then to Razboeni; there were many customers, too, at the church hostels. Sometimes you had to take them to Peatra, sometimes to Folticeni, sometimes to the fair, sometimes to Neamtzu Monastery, sometimes all about the place to the different festivals.

My father also said he had heard from my grandfather's grandfather that the then prior of Neamtzu is reported to have said to some nuns who were wandering through the town during Holy Week:

"Nuns!"

"Your blessing, reverend Father!"

"Why do you not stay in the convent and meditate during Passion Week?"

"Because, reverend Father," they are said to have replied with humility, "this wool worries us, but for that we should not come. Your Reverence knows we keep ourselves by selling serge, and though we do not collect a great deal, still those who go about get something to live on . . ."

Then, they say, the prior gave a sigh, and he laid all the blame on old Nichifor, saying:

"I would the driver who brought you here might die, for then he could not bring you so often to the town."

They say old Nichifor was greatly troubled in his mind when he heard this, and that he swore an oath that as long as he lived he would never again have dealings with the clergy, for, unfortunately, old Nichifor was pious and was much afraid of falling under the ban of the priests. He quickly went to the little monastery at Vovidenia to Chiviac, the anchorite of St. Agura, who dyed his hair and beard with black cherries, and on dry Friday he very devoutly baked an egg at a candle that he might be absolved from his sins. And after this he decided that from henceforth he would have more to do with the commercial side.

"The merchant," said old Nichifor, "lives by his business and for himself."

When he was asked why, old Nichifor answered jokingly:

"Because he has not got God for his master."

Old Nichifor was a wag among wags, there was no doubt of it, but owing to all he had to put up with he became a bit disagreeable.

I don't know what was the matter with her, but for some time past, his old wife had begun to grumble; now this hurt her; now that hurt her; now she had the ear-ache; now some one had cast a spell over her; now she was in tears. She went from one old witch to the other to get spells and ointments. As for old Nichifor, this did not suit him and he was not at all at his ease; if he stayed two or three days at home there was such bickering and quarrelling and ill will that his poor old wife rejoiced to see him leave the house.

It's plain old Nichifor was made for the road, and that when he was off it he was a different man; let him be able to crack his whip and he was ready to chaff all the travellers he met and tell anecdotes about all the chief places he passed through.

Early one day—it was the Wednesday before Whit-Sunday—old Nichifor had taken a wheel off the carriage, and was greasing it when suddenly Master Shtrul of Neamtzu town came up behind him; he was a grocer; a dealer in ointments; he took in washing; he traded in cosmetics, hair-dyes, toilet accessories, blue stone, rouge or some good pomade for the face, palm branches, smelling salts and other poisons.

At that time there was no apothecary in Neamtzu town and Master Shtrul to please the monks and nuns brought them all they wanted. Of course he did other business too. To conclude, I hardly know how to tell you, he was more important than the confessor, for without him the monasteries could not have existed.

"Good morning, Mosh Nichifor!"

"Good luck to you, Master Shtrul. What business brings you to us?"

"My daughter-in-law wants to go to Peatra. How much will you charge to take her there?"

"Probably she will have a great many packages like you do, sir," said old Nichifor, scratching his head. "That doesn't matter; she can have them. My carriage is large; it can hold a good deal. But without bargaining, Master Shtrul, you give me sixteen shillings and a gold irmal and I'll take her there quite easily; for you'll see, now I've attended to it and put some of this excellent grease into it, the carriage will run like a spinning-wheel."

"You must be satisfied with nine shillings, Mosh Nichifor, and my son will give you a tip when you get to Peatra."

"All right, then; may God be with us, Master Shtrul. I am glad the fair is in full swing just now; perhaps I shall get a customer for the return journey. Now I would like to know when we have to start?"

"Now, at once, Mosh Nichifor, if you are ready."

"I am ready, Master Shtrul; I have only to water the mares. Go and get your daughter-in-law ready."

Old Nichifor was energetic and quick at his work and he rapidly threw some fodder into the carriage, spread out a couple of leather cushions, put to the mares, flung his sheepskin cloak round his shoulders, took his whip in his hand and was up and away. Master Shtrul had scarcely reached home when old Nichifor drew up his carriage at the door. Malca—that was the name of Master Shtrul's daughter-in-law—came out to take a look at the driver.

This is Malca's story: it appeared that Peatra was her native place; she was very red in the face, because she had been crying at parting with her parents-in-law. It was the first time she had been in Neamtzu; it was her wedding visit as they say with us. It was not much more than two weeks since she had married Itzic, Master Shtrul's son, or, it would be better to say, in all good fellowship, that Itzic had married Malca. He had quitted his parents' house according to the custom, and in two weeks' time Itzic had brought Malca to Neamtzu and placed her in his parents' hands and had returned quickly to Peatra to look after his business.

"You have kept your promise, Mosh Nichifor?"

"Certainly, Master Shtrul; my word is my word. I don't trouble myself much. As for the

journey, it's as well to set out early and to halt in good time in the evening."

"Will you be able to reach Peatra by the evening, Mosh Nichifor."

"Eh! Do you know what you're talking about, Master Shtrul? I expect, so help me God, to get your daughter-in-law to Peatra this afternoon."

"You are very experienced, Mosh Nichifor; you know better than I do. All I beg of you is that you will be very careful to let no harm befall my daughter-in-law."

"I did not start driving the day before yesterday, Master Shtrul. I have already driven dames and nuns and noble ladies and other honest girls, and, praise be to God, none have ever complained of me. Only with the nun Evlampia, begging sister from Varatic, did I have a little dispute. Wherever she went it was her custom to tie a cow to the back of the carriage, for economy's sake, that she might have milk on the journey; this caused me great annoyance. The cow, just like a cow, pulled the forage out of my carriage, once it broke the rack, going uphill it pulled back, and once it nearly strangled my mares. And I, unhappy man that I am, was bold enough to say, 'Little nun, isn't it being a penny wise and a pound foolish?' Then she looked sadly at me, and in a gentle voice said to me, 'Do not speak so, Mosh Nichifor, do not speak thus of the poor little cow, for she, poor thing, is not

guilty of anything. The anchorite fathers of St. Agura have ordained that I should drink milk from a cow only, so that I may not get old quickly ; so what is to be done ? I must listen to them, for these holy men know a great deal better than do we poor sinners.'

"When I heard this, I said to myself, that perhaps the begging Sister had some reason on her side, and I left her to her fate, for I saw that she was funny and at all events was determined to drink only from one well. But, Master Shtrul, I do not think you are going to annoy me with cows too. And, then, Mistress Malca, where it is very steep, uphill or down, will always get out and walk a little way. It is so beautiful out in the country then. But there, we mustn't waste our time talking. Come, jump in, Mistress Malca, that I may take you home to your husband ; I know how sad it is for these young wives when they have not got their husbands with them ; they long for home as the horse longs for his nose-bag."

"I am ready to come, Mosh Nichifor."

And she began at once to pick up the feather mattress, the soft pillows, a bundle containing food, and other commodities. Then Malca took leave of her parents-in-law, and got on to the feather mattresses in the bottom of the carriage. Old Nichifor jumped on to the box, whipped up the mares, and left Master Shtrul and his wife behind in tears. Old Nichifor drove at a great pace

through the town, the mares seemed to be almost flying. They passed the beach, the villages, and the hill at Humuleshti in a second. From Ocea nearly to Grumazeshti they went at the gallop.

But the other side of Grumazeshti old Nichifor took a pull from the brandy flask which had come from Brashov, lit his pipe, and began to let the mares go their own pace.

"Look, Mistress Malca, do you see that fine, large village? It is called Grumazeshti. Were I to have as many bulls and you as many sons as Cossacks, barbarians and other low people have dropped dead there from time to time, it would be well for us!"

"God grant I may have sons, Mosh Nichifor."

"And may I have bulls, young lady—I have no hope of having sons; my wife is an unfruitful vine; she has not been busy enough to give me even one; may she die before long! When I am dead there'll be nothing left but this battered old carriage and these good-for-nothing mares!"

"Don't distress yourself, Mosh Nichifor," said Malca, "maybe God has willed it so; because it is written in our books, concerning some people, that only in their old age did they beget sons."

"Don't bother me, Mistress Malca, with your books. I know what I know; it's all in vain, we never can choose. I have heard it said in our church that 'a tree that bears no fruit should be hewn down and cast into the fire.' Can one have

anything clearer than that? Really, I wonder how I can have had patience to keep house with my old woman so long. In this respect you are a thousand times better off. If he does not give you a child you'll get some one else. If that does not do —why then another; and in due time will come a little blessing from the Almighty. It's not like that with us who see ourselves condemned to live with one barren stock to the end of our life with no prospect of children. After all the great and powerful Lord was not crucified for only one person in this world. Isn't it so, young lady? If you have anything more to say, say it!"

"It may be so, Mosh Nichifor."

"Dear young lady, it is as I tell you. *Houp là!* We have gone a good part of the way. Lord, how a man forgets the road when he's talking, and when one wakes up who knows where one has got to. It's a good thing the Holy God has given one companionship! Hi! daughters of a dragon, get on! Here is the Grumazeshti Forest, the anxiety of merchants and the terror of the boyars. Hei, Mistress Malca, if this forest had a mouth to tell what it has seen, our ears could not hear more terrible adventures: I know we should hear some things!"

"But what has happened here, Mosh Nichifor?"

"Oh, young lady, oh! God grant that what has been may never be again! One used to have some trouble to pass through here without being

robbed, thrashed or murdered. Of course this happened more often by night than by day. As for me, up to now, I have never spoken in an unlucky hour, God preserve me! Wolves and other wild beasts have come out in front of me at different times, but I didn't hurt them; I left them alone, I pretended not to see anything, and they went about their own business."

"Ah, Mosh Nichifor, don't talk about wolves any more, for they terrify me."

I have told you how amusing old Nichifor was; sometimes he would say something that made you hold your sides with laughing, at other times he would bring your heart into your mouth with fear.

"There is a wolf coming towards us, Mistress Malca!"

"Woe is me! Mosh Nichifor, where can I hide?"

"Hide where you are, for I can tell you one thing, I am not afraid of the whole pack."

Then poor Malca, terrified, clung round old Nichifor's neck, and stuck to him like a leech, and as she sat there she said, trembling:

"Where is the wolf, Mosh Nichifor?"

"Where is it? It crossed the road just in front of us, and went into the wood again. But if you had strangled me, young lady, and then the mares had bolted, it would have been a fine look out."

He had scarcely ceased speaking when Malca said softly:

"Never tell me again that a wolf is coming, Mosh Nichifor, I shall die from fright."

"It is not that I say so; there is one just coming; there you have one!"

"Alas! What are you saying?"

And again she hid close to old Nichifor.

"What is young is young. You want to play, young lady, isn't that it? It seems to me you're lucky, for I keep my self-control. I am not very afraid of the wolf, but if some one else had been in my place——"

"No more wolves will come, Mosh Nichifor, will they?"

"Oho! you are too funny, young lady, you want them to come too often. You mustn't expect to see a wolf at every tree. On St. Andrew's Day many of them prowl together in the same place and the huntsmen are on the watch. During the great hunt, do you think it's only a few wolves that are put to shame by having to leave their skins as hostages? Now we will let the mares get their wind. Look, this is 'Dragon Hill.' Once an enormous dragon alighted here, which spouted flames out of his mouth, and when it whistled the forest roared, the valleys groaned, the wild beasts trembled and beat their heads together with fear, and no one dared pass by here."

"Alas! And where is the dragon, Mosh Nichifor?"

"How should I know, young lady? The

forest is large, it knows where it has hidden itself. Some say that after it had eaten a great many people and peeled the bark off all the oaks in the wood it expired at this spot. By others I have heard it said that it made a black cow give it milk, and this enabled it to rise again into the skies whence it had fallen. But how do I know whom to believe? People will say anything! Luckily I understand witchcraft, and I am not at all afraid of dragons. I can take serpents out of their nest as easily as you can take a flea out of your poultry-house."

"Where did you learn these spells, Mosh Nichifor?"

"Eh? My dear young lady, that I may not tell. My old woman—she was just on twenty-four when I fell in love with her—what hasn't she done! How she has worried me to tell her, and I wouldn't tell her. And that's why she'll die when she does die, but why hasn't she died long before, for then I could have got a younger woman. For three days I can live in peace with her, and then it's enough to kill one! I am sick to death of the old hag. Every minute she worries and reproaches me by her manner. When I think that when I return I have got to go back to her, I feel wild—just inclined to run away—nothing more nor less."

"Stop, stop, Mosh Nichifor, you men are like that."

"Eh! Mistress Malca, here we are near the top of the wood. Won't you walk a little while we go

up the hill? I only say it because I am afraid you will get stiff sitting in the carriage. Look at the lovely flowers along the edge of the wood, they fill the air with sweetness. It is really a pity for you to sit huddled up there."

"I am afraid of the wolf, Mosh Nichifor," said Malca, shaking.

"Let's have done with that wolf. Have you nothing else to talk about?"

"Stand still that I may get down."

"Wo! Step gently here on to the step of the carriage. Ah, now I see for myself that you are sturdy; that's how I like people to be, born not laid."

While Malca gathered some balm to take to Itzic, old Nichifor stood still and tinkered a little at the carriage. Then he called quickly:

"Are you ready, young lady? Come, get in and let us get on with the help of God; from here on it is mostly down hill."

After Malca has mounted she asked:

"Are we a little late, Mosh Nichifor?"

"If we meet with no obstacles I shall soon have you in Peatra."

And he whipped up the mares, saying:

"White for the leader, white for the wheeler
The pole lies bare on the one side.
Heigh! It's not far to Galatz. Heigh!"

He had scarcely gone twenty yards when—bang! An axle-pin broke.

"Well, here's a to-do!"

"Woe is me! Mosh Nichifor, we shall be benighted in the wood."

"Don't take it amiss, Mistress Malca. Come, it's only happened to me once in my life. While you eat a little something, and the mares put away a bit of fodder, I shall have replaced the axle-pin."

When old Nichifor came to look at the hook, the little axe had disappeared!

"Well, what has been had to be," said old Nichifor, knitting his eyebrows, and getting angry as he thought of it. "If God punishes the old woman, may he punish her! See how she takes care of me; there is no axe here."

When poor Malca heard this she began to sigh and to say:

"Mosh Nichifor, what are we to do?"

"Now, young lady, don't lose heart, for I have still a ray of hope."

He drew his pocket-knife out of its sheath, he went to the side of the carriage, and began to cut away at a young oak of the previous year. He cut it as best he could, then he began to rummage about in a box in the carriage to find some rope; but how could he find it if it had not been put in? After looking and looking in vain, he cut the cord from the nose-bag, and a strap from the bridle of one of the mares to tie the sapling where it was wanted, put the wheel in position, slipped in the bit of wood which ran from the head of the axle to

the staff-side of the carriage, twisted round the chain which connected the head of the axle with the shaft, and tied it to the step; then he lit his pipe and said:

"Look, my dear young lady, how necessity teaches a man what to do. With old Nichifor of Tzutzuen no one comes to grief on the road. But from now on sit tight in the bottom of the carrriage, and hold fast to the back of your seat, for I must take these mares in hand and make them gallop. Yes, I warrant you, my old woman won't have an easy time when I get home. I'll play the devil with her and teach her how to treat her husband another time, for 'a woman who has not been beaten is like a broken mill.' Hold tight, Mistress Malca! *Houp-là!*"

And at once the mares began to gallop, the wheels to go round, and the dust to whirl up into the sky. But in a few yards the sapling began to get hot and brittle and—off came the wheel again!

"Ah! Everything is contrary! It's evident I crossed a priest early this morning or the devil knows what."

"Mosh Nichifor, what are we to do?"

"We shall do what we shall do, young lady. But now stay quiet here, and don't speak a word. It's lucky this didn't happen somewhere in the middle of the fields. Praise be to God, in the forest there is enough wood and to spare. Perhaps some one will catch us up who can lend me an axe."

And as he spoke he saw a man coming towards them.

"Well met, good man!"

"So your carriage has broken the road!"

"Put chaff aside, man; it would be better if you came and helped me to mend this axle, for you can see my heart's breaking with my ill luck."

"But I am in a hurry to get to Oshlobeni. You'll have to lament in the forest to-night; I don't think you'll die of boredom."

"I am ashamed of you," said Nichifor sulkily. "You are older than I am and yet you have such ideas in your head."

"Don't get excited, good man, I was only joking. Good luck! The Lord will show you what to do." And on he went.

"Look, Mistress Malca, what people the devil has put in this world! He is only out to steal. If there had been a barrel of wine or brandy about, do you think he would have left the carriage stuck in the middle of the road all that time? But I see, anything there is to do must be done by old Nichifor. We must have another try."

And again he began to cut another sapling. He tried and he tried till he got that, too, into place. Then he whipped up the mares and once more trotted a little way, but at the first slope, the axle-pin broke again.

"Now, Mistress Malca, I must say the same as that man, we shall have to spend the night in the forest."

"Oh! Woe is me! Woe is me! Mosh Nichifor, what are you saying?"

"I am saying what is obvious to my eyes. Look yourself; can't you see the sun is going down behind the hill, and we are still in the same place? It is nothing at all, so don't worry. I know of a clearing in the wood quite near here. We will go there, and we shall be just as though we were at home. The place is sheltered and the mares can graze. You'll sleep in the carriage, and I shall mount guard all night. The night soon passes, we must spend it as best we can, but I will remind my old woman all the rest of her days of this misfortune, for it is her fault that things have gone so with me."

"Well, do what you think best, Mosh Nichifor; it's sure to be right."

"Come, young lady, don't take it too much to heart, for we shall be quite all right."

And at once old Nichifor unharnessed the mares and, turning the carriage, he drew it as well as he could, till he reached the clearing.

"Mistress Malca, it is like a paradise straight from God here; where one lives for ever, one never dies! But you are not accustomed to the beauty of the world. Let us walk a little bit while we can still see, for we must collect sticks to keep

enough fire going all night to ward off the mosquitoes and gnats in the world."

Poor Malca saw it was all one now. She began to walk about and collect sticks.

"Lord! you look pretty, young lady. It seems as though you are one of us. Didn't your father once keep an inn in the village somewhere?"

"For a long time he kept the inn at Bodesti."

"And I was wondering how you came to speak Moldavian so well and why you looked like one of our women. I cannot believe you were really afraid of the wolf. Well, well, what do you think of this clearing? Would you like to die without knowing the beauty of the world? Do you hear the nightingales, how charming they are? Do you hear the turtle-doves calling to each other?"

"Mosh Nichifor, won't something happen to us this evening? What will Itzic say?"

"Itzic? Itzic will think himself a lucky man when he sees you at home again."

"Do you think Itzic knows the world? Or what sort of accidents could happen on the road?"

"He only knows how to walk about his hearth or by the oven like my worn-out old woman at home. Let me see whether you know how to make a fire."

Malca arranged the sticks; old Nichifor drew out the tinder box and soon had a flame. Then old Nichifor said:

"Do you see, Mistress Malca, how beautifully the wood burns?"

"I see, Mosh Nichifor, but my heart is throbbing with fear."

"Ugh! you will excuse me, but you seem to belong to the Itzic breed. Pluck up a little courage! If you are so timid, get into the carriage, and go to sleep: the night is short, daylight soon comes."

Malca, encouraged by old Nichifor, got into the carriage and lay down; old Nichifor lighted his pipe, spread out his sheepskin cloak and stretched himself by the side of the fire and puffed away at his pipe, and was just going off to sleep when a spark flew out on to his nose!

"Damn! That must be a spark from the sticks Malca picked up; it has burnt me so. Are you asleep, Mistress?"

"I think I was sleeping a little, Mosh Nichifor, but I had a nightmare and woke up."

"I have been unlucky too; a spark jumped out on to my nose and frightened sleep away or I might have slept all night. But can anyone sleep through the mad row these nightingales are making? They seem to do it on purpose. But then, this is their time for making love to each other. Are you asleep, young lady?"

"I think I was going to sleep, Mosh Nichifor."

"Do you know, young lady, I think I will put out the fire now at once: I have just remembered

that those wicked wolves prowl about and come after smoke."

"Put it out, Mosh Nichifor, if that's the case."

Old Nichifor at once began to put dust on the fire to smother it.

"From now on, Mistress Malca, you can sleep without anxiety till the day dawns. There! I've put out the fire and forgotten to light my pipe. But I've got the tinder box. The devil take you nightingales: I know too well you make love to each other!"

Old Nichifor sat thinking deeply until he had finished his pipe, then he rose softly and went up to the carriage on the tips of his toes.

Malca had begun to snore a little. Old Nichifor shook her gently and said:

"Mistress Malca! Mistress Malca!"

"I hear, Mosh Nichifor," replied Malca, trembling and frightened.

"Do you know what I've been thinking as I sat by the fire?"

"What, Mosh Nichifor?"

"After you have gone to sleep, I will mount one of the mares, hurry home, fetch an axle-pin and axe, and by daybreak I shall be back here again."

"Woe is me! Mosh Nichifor, what are you saying? Do you want to find me dead from fright when you come back?"

"May God preserve you from such a thing! Don't be frightened, I was only talking at random."

"No, no, Mosh Nichifor, from now on I shall not want to sleep; I shall get down and sit by you all night."

"You look after yourself, young lady; you sit quietly where you are, for you are comfortable."

"I am coming all the same."

And as she spoke down she came and sat on the grass by old Nichifor. And first one, and then the other was overcome by sleep, till both were slumbering profoundly. And when they woke it was broad daylight.

"See, Mistress Malca, here's the blessed day! Get up and come and see what's to be done. There, no one has eaten you, have they? Only you have had a great fright!"

Malca fell asleep again at these words. But old Nichifor, like a careful man, got up into the carriage, and began rummaging about all over the place, and under the forage bags, and what should there be but the axe and a measure and a gimlet beneath the seat.

"Who would have believed it! Here's a pity! I was wondering why my old woman didn't take care of me. Now because I wronged her so terribly I must take her back a red fez and a bag of butter to remind her of our youth. Evidently I took them out yesterday with my pipe. But my poor, good old wife, difficult though she is, knew all I should want on the journey, only she did not put them in their right place. But the woman tried to under-

stand all her husband wanted! Mistress Malca! Mistress Malca!"

"What is it, Mosh Nichifor?"

"Do you know that I have found the axe, and the rope and the gimlet and everything I want."

"Where, Mosh Nichifor?"

"Why, under your bundles. Only they had no mouths with which to tell me. We have made a mistake: we have been like some one sitting on hidden treasure and asking for alms. But it's good that we have found them now. It shows my poor old woman did put them in."

"Mosh Nichifor, you are feeling remorse in your heart."

"Well, yes, young lady. I see I am at fault. I must sing a song of penitence:

Poor old wife of mine!
Be she kind or be she harsh,
Still her home is mine."

And so saying old Nichifor rolled up his sleeves, cut a beech stick, and made a wonderful axle-pin. Then he set it in position, put the wheel in place, harnessed the mares, quietly took the road and said:

"In you get, young lady, and let's start."

As the mares were refreshed and well rested they were at Peatra by middle day.

"There you will see your home, Mistress Malca."

"Thank God, Mosh Nichifor, that I came to no harm in the forest."

"The fact is, young lady, there's no doubt about it, there's no place like home."

And while they were talking they reached the door of Itzic's house. Itzic had only just come back from the school, and when he saw Malca he was beside himself with joy. But when he heard all about the adventures they had met with and how the Almighty had delivered them from danger he did not know how to thank old Nichifor enough. What did he not give him! He himself marvelled at all that was given him. The next day old Nichifor went back with other customers. And when he reached home he was so gay that his old woman wondered what he had been doing, for he was more drunk than he had been for a long time.

From now on Malca came every two or three weeks to visit her parents-in-law in Neamtzu: she would only let old Nichifor take her back home, and she was never again afraid of wolves.

A year, or perhaps several years, after, over a glass of wine, old Nichifor whispered to one of his friends the story of the adventure in the "Dragon" Wood, and the fright Mistress Malca got. Old Nichifor's friend whispered it again to some friends of his own, and then people, the way people will do, began to give old Nichifor a nickname and say: "Nichifor, the Impostor: Nichifor, the Impostor:" and even though he is dead the poor man has kept the name of Nichifor, the Impostor, to this very day.

COZMA RACOARE

By M. Sadoveanu

HE was a terrible man, Cozma Racoare!

When I say Cozma, I seem to see, do you know, I seem to see before me, a sinister-looking man riding upon a bay horse; two eyes like steel pierce through me; I see a moustache like twin sparrows. Fierce Rouman! He rode with a gun across his back, and with a knife an ell long, here, in his belt, on the left side. It was thus I always saw him. I am old, you know, nigh on a hundred, I have travelled much about the world, I have met various characters, and many people, but I tell you, a man like Cozma Racoare I have never seen! Yet he was not physically so terrible; he was a man of middle height, lean, with a brown face, a man like many another—ha! but all the same! only to have seen the eyes was to remember him. Terrible Rouman!

There was grief and bitterness in the land at that time. Turks and Greeks were overrunning

the country on all sides, everywhere honest men were complaining—they were hard times! Cozma had no cares. To-day he was here, to-morrow one heard of him, who knows where! Every one fled before the storm, but he, good Lord, he never cared! They caught him and put him in chains. What need? He just shook himself, wrenched the bars with one hand, whistled to his horse, and there he was on the road again. Who did not know that Racoare had a charmed life? Ah, how many bullets were aimed at his breast! But in vain! It was said of him: only a silver bullet can slay him! Where do you see men like that nowadays? Those times are gone for ever.

Have you heard of the Feciorul Romancei? He was a fire-eater too! He robbed the other side of Muntenia, Cozma robbed this, and one night—what a night!—they both met at Milcov, exchanged booty, and were back in their homes before dawn. Were the frontier guards on the watch? Did they catch them as they rode? Why! Racoare's horse flew like a phantom, no bullet could touch him! What a road that is from here, across the mountains of Bacau, to the frontier! Eh! to do it, there and back in one night, you mark my words, that's no joke! But that horse! That's the truth of the matter, that horse of Racoare's was not like any other horse. That's clear.

Voda-Calimbach had an Arabian mare, which his servants watched as the apple of his eye; she was due to foal. One night—it was in the seventh month—Cozma got into the stall, ripped open the mare and stole the foal. But that was not all he did! You understand the foal was wrapped in a caul. Racoare cut the caul, but he cut it in such a way as to split the foal's nostrils. And look, the foal with the split nostrils grew up in the dark fed upon nut kernels; and when Cozma mounted it—well, that was a horse!

Even the wind, therefore, could not outdistance Cozma. On one occasion—I was a volunteer then—Cozma woke to find himself within the walls of Probot, with volunteers inside and the Turks outside. The Turks were battering the walls with their guns. The volunteers decided to surrender the fortress. Cozma kept his own counsel. The next day Cozma was nowhere to be found. But from the walls, up to the forest of Probot, was a line of corpses! That had been Racoare's road!

That is how it always was! His were the woods and fields! He recognized no authority, he did not know what fear was, nor love—except on one occasion. Terrible Rouman! It seems to me I can see him now, riding upon his bay horse.

. . . . .

At that time a Greek was managing the Vulturesht estate, and on this side, on our estate, within those ruined walls, there ruled such a minx of a Roumanian as I had never seen before. The Greek was pining for the Roumanian. And no wonder! The widow had eyebrows that met, and the eyes of the devil—Lord! Lord! such eyes would have tempted a saint. She had been married, against her will, to a Greek, to Dimitru Covas; the Greek died, and now the lady ruled alone over our estate.

As I tell you, Nicola Zamfiridi, the Greek, was dying for the lady. What did that man not do, where did he not go, what soothsayers did he not visit, all in vain! The lady would not hear of it! She hated the Greek. And yet Nicola was not ill-favoured. He was a proud Greek, bronzed, with pointed moustache and curly beard. But still he did not please the widow!

One day, Nicola sat pondering in his room while he smoked. What was to be done? He most certainly wanted to marry, and to take her for his wife; why would she not hear of it?

A few days before he had gone with Ciocirlie, the gipsy, and had sung desperately outside the walls. Alas, the courtyard remained still as stone! What the devil was to be done?

Boyar Nicola thought to himself: "You are not ugly, you are not stupid—what's the reason

of it? Is she, perhaps, in love with some one else?" No. He watched for one whole night. Nobody entered, and nobody left the courtyard.

The boyar was angry. He rose, picked up a whip and went out. The grooms were grooming the horses in the yard.

"Is that horse supposed to be groomed?" he shouted, and slash! down came the whip on one of the grooms.

Farther on the gardener was resting from the heat.

"Is this how you look after the garden? Hey!" and swish! crack!

What next? Was it any use losing one's temper with the people? He went into the garden, and seated himself under a beautiful lime-tree. There, on the stone bench, he pondered again. His life was worthless if the woman he loved would not look at him! He watched the flight of the withered leaves in the still air; he heaved a sigh.

"Vasile! Vasile!" called the boyar. His voice rang sadly in the melancholy garden.

A sturdy old man came through the garden door, and went towards his master.

"Vasile," said the boyar, "what is to be done?"

The old man eyed his master, then he, too, sighed and scratched his head.

"What is to be done, Vasile?"

"How should I know, master?"

"You must find something. Many people have advised me, now you suggest something. I got nothing out of that old witch, and Ciocirlie was no good; cannot you propose something?"

"H'm ——'

"Do not desert me, Vasile!"

"H'm, master, I'll tell you something if you will give me something."

"Take a ducat of mine, Vasilica—speak!"

Vasile did not let himself be put off by the mention of one ducat. He scratched his head again.

"If I knew you would give me two ducats, master, or even three, or many—you understand—that's how it is! What will be, will be! I say go right off to Frasini, go into the courtyard, through the courtyard into the lady's boudoir and steal her! That's what I say!"

"What are you talking about, good Vasile! Is it possible!"

Vasile said no more. The boyar thought deeply, his hand on his forehead; then he said:

"That's what I must do, Vasile! I know what I have to do! Bravo you, good Vasile!"

"If only I knew I was to get two ducats reward!" sighed Vasile, scratching his head.

And that evening Boyar Nicola kept his word. He mounted his horse, took with him five companions from among the grooms, and started out to Frasini.

The forest shuddered with the whisper of the breeze of the autumn night. The men rode silently. From time to time could be heard the trumpeting of the cock, coming they knew not whence. Beyond lay silence. At last the widow's courtyard came into sight, black, like some heap of coal.

Like ghosts Nicola and his companions approached the wall; in silence they dismounted; they threw rope-ladders over the top of the wall, climbed up and over to the other side. The horses remained tied to the trees.

Suddenly they heard cries. Boyar Nicola was not afraid. He hurried to the door—the doors were not shut. He passed along the corridor.

"Aha!" murmured the Greek. "Now I shall have the darling in my arms."

But suddenly a door was opened, and a bright sea of light illuminated the passage. Boyar Nicola was not frightened. He advanced towards the room. But he had scarcely gone two paces when there, on the threshold, stood the Sultana, with her hair undone, in a thin white petticoat and a white dressing-jacket. With frowning brows she stood in the doorway looking at the boyar.

Nicola was beside himself. He would willingly have gone on his knees, and kissed her feet, so beautiful was she. But he knew if he knelt before her she would only mock him. He approached to embrace her.

"Hold!" cried the Sultana. "I thought

there were thieves! Ha, ha! it is you, Boyar Nicola?"

And suddenly, there in the light, she raised a shining scimitar in her right hand. Nicola felt a hard blow on the side of his head. He stood still. His grooms started to run, but one fell, yelling, and covered with blood. Just then a great noise was heard, and the lady's servants came in.

Nicola fled towards the exit followed by his four companions. Then on into the yard with scimitars flashing on their right and on their left. And once more they are on horseback fleeing towards Vulturesht.

There he dismounted, feeling very bitter, and entered the garden once more, and once more sat on the stone bench, and hid his face in his hands.

"Woe is me!" he murmured miserably. "How wretched is my life! What is to be done? What is to be done?"

He sat there in the October night tortured by his thoughts. Only the breeze carrying the mist from the fields disturbed him.

"Woe is me! How wretched is my life!" and he bent forward, his head in his hands, his elbows on his knees. "What a terrible woman!" he murmured again as he mused. "What eyes she has! Oh, Blessed Virgin! Oh, Blessed Virgin! Do not abandon me, for my heart is breaking!"

For some time he stayed there dreaming. After a while he rose and moved towards the house.

"What a terrible woman, and what eyes!"

In the house he once more called for Vasile.

"Good Vasile, I am undone! A terrible woman, good Vasile—she has burnt my heart and turned it to ashes! What is to be done? Do not leave me! Look, you understand, you shall have two of my ducats."

"I know what you have been through, master. She is a proud lady, there is no denying it! If I knew you would give me five ducats, or even six—but there, it's only an idea——"

"Speak, Vasile, good man, I will give you—— What eyes! Woe is me!"

"Then I understand, master," says Vasile, "that you give me seven ducats, but you'll have to give seven times seven if you get her here at your hand—don't be afraid, master, it is not much —only seven times seven to have her here at your hand! I'll bring Cozma Racoare to you! As sure as you put the ducats into the palm of my hand, so sure will he put the Sultana into your arms, that's that"

Boyar Nicola was rather alarmed when he heard talk of Cozma Racoare, but afterwards he sighed and said:

"Good!"

Three days later Racoare came. Nicola was sitting on the stone bench in the garden under the

lime-tree, smoking a pipe of fragrant tobacco. When he caught sight of the highwayman he sat gazing at him with startled eyes. Cozma came calmly along with his horse's bridle in his left hand. He wore top boots up to his knees with long steel spurs. A long gun was slung across his back. On his head was a black sheepskin cap. He walked unconcernedly as usual with knitted brows; his horse followed him with bent head.

Vasile, the boyar's agent, came up to the stone seat, scratching his head, and whispered with a grin:

"What do you say to this, master? Just take a look at him. He could bring you the devil himself!"

Boyar Nicola could not take his eyes off Cozma. The highwayman stopped and said:

"God be with you!"

"I thank you," replied Vasile. "God grant it!"

The boyar remained persistently silent.

"H'm!" murmured Vasile. "You have come to see us, friend Cozma?"

"I have come," responded Racoare.

"On our business?"

"Yes."

Cozma spoke slowly, frowning; wherever he might be no smile ever lit up his face.

"Ah, yes, you have come," said the boyar, as if awaking from sleep. "Vasile, go and tell them to prepare coffee, but bring wine at once."

"Let them make coffee for one," said Cozma, "I never drink."

Vasile went off grinning, after a side-glance at his master.

"Ah, you never drink!" said the boyar with an effort. "So, so, you have come on our business—how much? Ah, I am giving fifty ducats."

"Good!" said Racoare quietly.

Vasile returned, smiling knowingly. The boyar was silent.

"Eh," said Vasile, scratching his head, "how are you getting on?"

"Good Vasile, go and fetch the purse from under my pillow."

"No, there is no need to give me a purse," said the highwayman, "I have no need of money."

"What?" murmured the boyar. "Ah, yes! You do not need? Why?"

"The thing is to put the Sultana of Frasini into your arms—I hand you over the lady, and you hand me the money."

"Let's be brief!" cried Vasile, passing his hand through his hair. "One party gives the lady, the other the money. What did I tell you? Cozma would fetch you the devil from hell. From henceforth the lady is yours."

Racoare turned round, strode to the bottom of the garden, fastened his horse to a tree, drew a cloak of serge from his saddle, spread it out and wrapped himself in it.

"Well! Well!" groaned Boyar Nicola, breathing heavily. "What a terrible man! But I feel as though he had taken a load off my mind."

Vasile smiled but said nothing. Later, when he was by himself, he began to laugh and whisper: "Ha, ha! He who bears a charmed life is a lucky man!"

The boyar started up as from sleep and looked fearfully at Vasile; then he shook his head and relapsed into thought.

"Ah, yes!" he murmured, without understanding what he was talking about.

. . . . .

When night had fallen Cozma Racoare tightened his horse's girths and mounted. Then he said:

"Boyar, wait for me in the glade at Vulturesht."

The gates were opened, the horse snorted and rushed forth like a dragon.

The full moon shone through the veil of an autumnal mist, weaving webs of light, lighting up the silent hills and the dark woods. The rapid flight of the bay broke the deep silence. Racoare rode silently under the overhanging woods with their sparse foliage; he seemed like a phantom in the blue light.

Then he reached Frasini. Every one was asleep, the doors were shut. Cozma knocked at the door: Rat-a-tat! Rat-a-tat!

"Who is there?' cried a voice from within.

"Open!" said Racoare.

"Who are you?"

"Open!" shouted Cozma.

From within was heard a whispered:

"Open!" "Do not open!" "Open, it is Cozma!"

A light shone through a niche in the wall above the door, and lighted up Cozma's face. Then a rustling sound became audible, the light was extinguished, and the bar across the door rattled.

Cozma entered the empty courtyard, dismounted by the steps, and pushed open the door.

"The door is open," he murmured, "the lady is not nervous."

In the dark corridor his footsteps and his spurs echoed as in a church. A noise was heard in one of the rooms, and a bright light shone into the passage. The Sultana appeared in the doorway, dressed in white with her hair unplaited, with frowning brows and the scimitar in her right hand.

"Who are you? What do you want?" she cried.

"I have come to fetch you," said Racoare shortly, "and take you to Boyar Nicola."

"Ah, you are not burglars?" said the lady, and raised her scimitar. "See here, you will meet the same fate as your Nicola!"

Racoare took a step forward, calmly seized the scimitar, squeezed the lady's fist, and the steel blade flew into a corner. The lady sprang quickly back, calling:

"Gavril! Niculai! Toader! Help!"

Voices were heard, and the servants crowded into the passage, and stood by the door. Racoare approached the lady, and tried to seize her. She avoided him, and caught up a knife from the table.

"What are you doing, you boobies? Help! Seize him, bind him!"

"Don't talk nonsense—I see you are not frightened; I cannot do other than I am doing!" said Racoare.

Then the servants murmured again:

"How can we bind him? It is Racoare. He is here! Cozma Racoare, lady!"

"Cowards!" cried the lady, and threw herself upon Cozma.

The highwayman took her arm, pressed her hands together, tied them with a leather strap, and lifted her under his arm like a bundle.

"Get out of the way!" he said then, and the people fell over each other as they scattered to either side.

"What a pearl among women!" thought Cozma, while he strode along the corridor with the lady under his arm, "he has not bad taste, that Boyar Nicola! Proud woman!"

The Sultana looked with eyes wide with horror at the servants who gave way on either hand in their terror. She felt herself held as in a vice. At last she raised her eyes to Racoare's fierce face.

The light from the room was reflected in the man's steely eyes, and lit up his weather-beaten face.

"Who are you?" she gasped.

"I? Cozma Racoare."

The lady gave another glance at the servants huddled in the corners, and she said not another word. Now she understood.

Outside, the highwayman mounted the bay, placed the lady in front of him, and set spurs to his horse. Once more the sound of the galloping horse broke the silence of the night.

"What a pearl among women!" thought Racoare, and the horse sped along the road like a phantom.

The lady turned her head, and studied Racoare by the light of the moon.

"Why do you look at me like that, lady?" And the horse sped along under the overhanging woods.

The black hair of the lady shone in great billows of light. The foliage glistened with hoar-frost, like silver-leaf. The lady looked at the highwayman and shuddered, she felt herself squeezed in his powerful arms, and her eyes burnt like two stars beneath the heavy knitted brows.

"Why do you look at me like that, lady? Why do you shiver? Are you cold?"

The galloping hooves thundered through the glades, the leaves glittered in their silver sheen, and the bay passed on like a phantom in the light.

A shadow suddenly appeared in the distance.

"What is that yonder?" questioned the lady.

"Boyar Nicola awaits us there," replied Racoare.

The lady said no more. But Cozma felt her stiffen herself. The leather strap was snapped, and two white hands were lifted up. The highwayman had no time to stop her. Like lightning she seized the bridle in her right hand, and turned the horse on the spot, but her left arm she twined round Racoare's neck. The highwayman felt the lady's head resting against his breast, and a voice murmured softly:

"Would you give me to another?"

And the horse flew like a phantom through the blue light; the meadows rang with the sound of the galloping hooves, the silver leaves glistened, and tresses of black hair floated in the wind. But now shadows seemed to be pursuing them. The hills on the horizon seemed peopled with strange figures, which hurried through the light mist. But the black phantom sped on, and ever onwards, till it was lost in the far distance, in the gloom of the night.

THE WANDERERS

By M. Sadoveanu

A HOUSE stood isolated in the middle of a garden, separated from the main group about the market-place.

It was an old house, its veranda was both high and broad and had big whitewashed pillars. The pointed roof was tiled and green with moss. In front of the veranda, and facing south, stood two beautiful round lime-trees throwing out their shade.

One day in the month of August, the owners, Vladimir Savicky and Ana, his wife, were sitting in the veranda. Both were old, weather-beaten by the storms of many journeys and the misfortunes of life. The old man wore a long white beard and long white hair, which was parted down the middle and smooth on the top; he smoked a very long pipe, and his blue eyes gazed towards the plains which stretched away towards the sunset. The old woman, Ana, selected a nosegay of flowers from a basket. He was tall and vigorous still, she was slight with gentle movements. Forty years ago

they left their ruined Poland, and settled in our country. They kept an adopted daughter, and had a son of thirty years of age, a bachelor, and a good craftsman. They had lived for thirty years here in the old house, busying themselves with market-gardening : for thirty years they had lived a sad, monotonous life in this place. They had been alone with their adopted child, with Magdalena ; Roman, their boy, had been roaming through the world for the last ten years.

Old Vladimir puffed away at his pipe as he stroked his beard ; the warmth of the afternoon had made him lay aside his blue jacket. The old wife was choosing her flowers. A gentle breeze, laden with fragrance, came from the garden, from the trees heavy with fruit, and from the gay-coloured flowers. Shafts of light penetrated through the leafy limes, little patches of white light came from above, and played over the bright grass, green as the tree-frog. From time to time the quivering foliage sent a melodious rustle into the peaceful balcony.

At intervals the soft notes of a song floated through the open window.

Suddenly a resounding noise broke the stillness of the day. What was it ? A carriage. The old man started, put down his pipe, and rose. The old woman put her head, wrapped in a white shawl, out over the railings. The rumbling vehicle, an ugly Jew upon the box, drew nearer, and pulled up outside the door of the old house. A strong, broad-

shouldered young man descended, a big bundle in his right hand, a case in his left.

"Roman! Roman!" cried the old lady in a feeble voice. She tried to rise but fell softly back beside the flowers.

"There, there, old lady, it is Roman," murmured the old man gaily, as he went down the stairs.

"Mr. Roman!" cried a gentle voice, and Magdalena's fair head appeared at the window.

Roman had let fall the bundle and thrown himself into his father's arms.

"Yes, old lady, it is Roman!" murmured Vladimir Savicky, with tears in his eyes. He embraced his son, and pressed him to his heart. "Yes, old lady, it is Roman!" That was all he could find to say.

"Mother," cried the young man, "I have not seen you for ten years."

The old mother cried silently, her son strained her to his breast, while the old man wandered round murmuring tearfully into his beard:

"Yes, yes, old lady, it is our Roman."

As Roman Savicky straightened his strong frame and turned round, he saw a white face with blue eyes in the doorway. He stood transfixed with astonishment; the girl watched him, smiling shyly.

"Ha! ha!" laughed old Savicky, "how now? Do you not know each other? Ah! Kiss each

other, you have known Magdalena ever since she was a child."

The young people approached each other in silence, the girl offered her cheek with eyelids lowered, and Roman kissed her.

"I did not recognize her," said Roman, "she has grown so big."

His mother laughed softly. "You, too, Roman, you have grown much bigger—and handsome."

"Naturally *our* Roman is handsome," said the old man, "our own Roman, old lady."

Again the mother kissed her son. Roman seated himself upon a chair in the veranda, the old man placed himself on his right, and the mother on the left; they watched him, feasting their eyes upon him.

"My darling! my darling!" he said to the old woman, "it is long since I have seen you."

In the end they grew silent, looking intently at one another, smiling. The gentle rustle of the lime trees broke the heat and stillness of the August day.

"Whence do you come, Roman?" questioned the old man suddenly.

"From Warsaw," said his son, raising his head.

The old man opened wide his eyes, then he turned towards Ana.

"Do you hear that, old lady, from Warsaw?"

The old lady nodded her head, and said wonderingly:

"From Warsaw!"

"Yes," said Roman, "I have journeyed throughout Poland, full of bitterness, and I have wandered among our exiled brothers in all parts of the world."

Profound misery rang in his powerful voice. The old people looked smilingly at him, lovingly, but without understanding him. All acute feeling for their country had long ago died away in their hearts. They sat looking happily into the blue eyes of their Roman, at his fair, smooth face, at his beautiful luxuriant hair.

The young man began to speak. Gradually his voice rose, it rang powerfully, full of sorrow and bitterness. Where had he not been! He had been everywhere, and everywhere he had met exiled Poles, pining away among strangers, dying far from the land of their fathers. Everywhere the same longing, everywhere the same sorrow. Tyrants ruled over the old hearth, the cry of the oppressed rent the air, patriots lay in chains or trod the road to Siberia, crowds fled from the homes of their fathers, strangers swept like a flood into their places.

"Roman, Roman!" said the old woman, bursting into tears, "how beautifully you talk."

"Beautifully talks our Roman, old lady," said Vladimir Savicky sadly, "beautifully, but he brings us sad tidings."

And in the old man's soul old longings and bitter memories began to stir. On the threshold

Magdalena stood dismayed and shuddered as she looked at Roman.

Suddenly two old men entered by the door. One had thick, grizzled whiskers, the other a long beard in which shone silver threads.

"Ah," cried the old Savicky, "here comes Palchevici, here comes Rujancowsky. Our Roman has come! Here he is!"

"We know," said Rujancowsky gravely, "we have seen him."

"Yes, yes, we have seen him," murmured Palchevici.

They both approached and shook Roman warmly by the hand.

"Good day and welcome to you! See, now all the Poles of this town are met together in one place," said Rujancowsky.

"What?" questioned Roman. "Only these few are left?"

"The others have passed away," said old Savicky sadly.

"Yes, they have passed away," murmured Palchevici, running his fingers through his big grey whiskers.

They were all silent for a time.

"Old lady," said Vladimir Savicky, "go and fetch a bottle of wine and get something to eat too, perhaps Roman is hungry. But where are you? Where is Ana?" asked the old man, looking at Magdalena.

"Do not worry, she has gone to get things ready," replied the girl smilingly.

"'Tis well! 'tis well!" Then turning towards the two Poles. "You do not know how Roman can talk. You should hear him. Roman, you must say it again."

The old wife came with wine and cold meat. She placed meat in front of her boy, and the wine before the older men. They all began to talk. But Roman's voice sounded melancholy in the stillness of the summer day. Then they began to drink to Roman's health, to the health of each one of them.

"To Poland!" cried Roman excitedly, striking the table with his fist. And then he began to speak:

"Do you realize how the downtrodden people begin to murmur and to agitate? Soon there will rise a mighty storm which will break down the prison walls, the note of liberty will ring through our native land! Ah, you do not know the anguish and the bitterness *there!* Stranger-ridden and desolate! Since Kosciusko died there are exiles and desolation everywhere! Mother," cried Roman, then turning towards the old woman, "give me the case from over there, I must sing something to you."

With these words his eyes darkened and he stared into space. The old people looked at him, much moved, their heads upon their breasts, not

speaking a word. Quiet reigned in the old house, and in the garden there was peace ; a fiery sunset, crowned with clouds of flame, was merging into the green sea of the woods. Golden rays penetrated into the old veranda and shone on Roman's hair.

His mother handed him the case.

"Well," said the young man, "I will sing you something with my cither. I will sing of our grief."

Then, beneath his fingers, the strings began to murmur as though awaking from sleep. Roman bent forward and began, the old people sat motionless round him.

Sad tones vibrated through the quiet of the old house, notes soft and sorrowful like some remote mournful cry, notes deep with the tremor of affliction ; the melody rose sobbing through the clear sunset like the flight of some bird of passage.

In the souls of the old people there rose like a storm the clamour of past sorrows. The song lamented the ruin of fair lands ; they seemed to listen, as in a sad dream, to the bitter tears of those dying for their native land. They seemed to see Kosciusko, worn with the struggle, covered in blood, kneeling with a sword in hand.

Finis Poloniæ ! Poland is no more ! Ruin everywhere, death all around ; a cry of sorrow rose ; the children were torn from their unhappy land to pine away and die on alien soil !

The chords surged, full of grief, through the

clear sunset. Then slowly, slowly, the melody died away as though tired with sorrow until the final chord finished softly, like a distant tremor, ending in deathlike silence.

The listeners seemed turned to stone. Roman leant his head upon his hand, and his eyes, full of pain, turned towards the flaming sunset. His chin trembled ; his mind was full of bitter memories. The old men sat as though stunned, like some wounded creatures, their heads upon their breasts ; the old mother cried softly, sighing, her eyes upon her Roman. As the young man turned his eyes towards the door he saw two bright tears in Magdalena's blue eyes ; amid a deep silence his own eyes gazed into the girl's while the last crimson rays faded away from the woods.

THE FLEDGELING

By I. Al. Bratescu-Voineshti

ONE springtime a quail nearly dead with fatigue—she came from far-away Africa—dropped from her flight into a green cornfield on the edge of a plantation. After a few days of rest she began to collect twigs, dried leaves, straw, and bits of hay, and made herself a nest on a mound of earth, high up, so that the rain would not spoil it; then for seven days in succession she laid an egg, in all seven eggs, as small as sugar eggs, and she began to sit upon them.

Have you seen how a hen sits on her eggs? Well, that is how the quail did, but instead of sitting in a coop, she sat out of doors, among the grain; it rained, it pelted with rain, but she never moved, and not a drop reached the eggs. After three weeks there hatched out some sweet little birds, not naked like the young of a sparrow, but covered with yellow fluff, like chickens, only smaller, like seven little balls of silk, and they began to scramble through the corn, looking for food. Sometimes the quail caught an ant, sometimes a grass-

hopper, which she broke into pieces for them, and with their little beaks they went pic ! pic ! pic ! and ate it up immediately.

They were pretty and prudent and obedient ; they walked about near their mother, and when she called to them " pitpalac ! " they ran quickly back to her. Once, in the month of June, when the peasants came to reap the corn, the eldest of the chicks did not run quickly at his mother's call, and, alas, a boy caught him under his cap. He alone could tell the overwhelming fear he felt when he found himself clasped in the boy's hand ; his heart beat like the watch in my pocket. Luckily for him an old peasant begged him off.

" Let him go, Marin, it's a pity on him, he will die. Don't you see he can hardly move, he is quite dazed."

When he found himself free, he fled full of fear to the quail to tell her what had befallen him. She drew him to her and comforted him, and said to him :

" Do you see what will happen if you do not listen to me ? When you are big you can do what you like, but while you are little you must follow my words or something worse may overtake you."

And thus they lived, contented and happy. The cutting of the corn and the stacking of the sheaves shook a mass of seeds on to the stubble which gave them food, and, although there was no water near, they did not suffer from thirst because in the early

morning they drank the dew-drops on the blades of grass. By day, when it was very hot, they stayed in the shade of the plantation ; in the afternoon, when the heat grew less, they all went out on to the stubble, but on the cold nights they would gather in a group under the protecting wings of the quail as under a tent. Gradually the fluff upon them had changed into down and feathers, and with their mother's help they began to fly. The flying lesson took place in the early morning towards sunrise, when night was turning into day, and in the evening in the twilight, for during the daytime there was danger from the hawks which hovered above the stubble-field.

Their mother sat upon the edge and asked them :

" Are you ready ? "

" Yes," they answered.

" One, two, three ! "

And when she said " three," whrrr ! away they all flew from the side of the plantation, as far as the sentry-box on the high road, and back again. And their mother told them they were learning to fly in preparation for a long journey they would have to take when the summer was over.

" We shall have to fly high up above the earth for days and nights, and we shall see below us great towns and rivers and the sea."

One afternoon towards the end of August, while the chicks were playing happily near their mother

in the stubble, a carriage was heard approaching, and it stopped in the track by the edge of the plantation. They all raised their heads with eyes like black beads and listened. A voice could be heard calling: "Nero! to heel!"

The chicks did not understand, but their mother knew it was a man out shooting, and she stood petrified with fear. The plantation was their refuge, but exactly from that direction came the sportsman. After a moment's thought she ordered them to crouch down close to the earth, and on no consideration to move.

"I must rise, you must stay motionless, he who flies is lost. Do you understand?"

The chicks blinked their eyes to show they understood, and remained waiting in silence. They could hear the rustling of a dog moving through the stubble, and from time to time could be heard a man's voice: "Where are you? To heel, Nero!"

The rustling drew near—the dog saw them; he remained stationary, one paw in the air, his eyes fixed upon them.

"Do not move," whispered the quail to them, and she ran quickly farther away from them.

The dog followed slowly after her. The sportsman hurried up. His foot was so near to them that they could see an ant crawling up the leg of his boot. Oh, how their hearts beat! A few seconds later the quail rose, and flew low along the

ground a few inches in front of the dog's muzzle. It pursued her, and the sportsman followed, shouting: "To heel! to heel!" He could not shoot for fear of hurting the dog; the quail pretended to be wounded so well that the dog was determined to catch her at all cost, but when she thought she was out of range of the gun she quickly flew for shelter towards the plantation.

During this time, the eldest fledgeling, instead of remaining motionless like his brothers, as their mother bade them, had taken to his wings; the sportsman heard the sound of his flight, turned and shot. He was some distance away. Only a single shot reached his wings. He did not fall, he managed to fly as far as the plantation, but there the movement of the wings caused the bone which had only been cracked at first to give way altogether, and the fledgeling fell with a broken wing.

The sportsman, knowing the plantation was very thick, and seeing it was a question of a young bird only, decided it was not worth while to look for it among the trees. The other little birds did not move from the spot where the quail had left them.

They listened in silence. From time to time they heard the report of a gun and the voice of the sportsman calling: "Bring it here!" After a time the carriage left the cart-track by the plantation and followed the sportsman; gradually the shots and the shouting became fainter and died away, and

in the silence of the evening nothing could be heard but the song of the crickets ; but when night had fallen and the moon had risen above Cornatzel, they clearly heard their mother's voice calling to them from the end of the stubble : " Pitpalac ! pitpalac ! " They flew quickly towards her and found her. She counted them ; one was missing.

" Where is the eldest one ? "

" We do not know—he flew off."

Then the heart-broken quail began to call loudly, and yet more loudly, listening on every side. A faint voice from the plantation answered : " Piu ! piu ! " When she found him, when she saw the broken wing, she knew his fate was sealed, but she hid her own grief in order not to discourage him.

From now on, sad days began for the poor fledgeling. He could scarcely move with his wing trailing behind him ; with tearful eyes he watched his brothers learning to fly in the early morning and in the evening ; at night when the others were asleep under his mother's wings, he would ask her anxiously :

" Mother, I shall get well, I shall be able to go with you, shan't I ? And you will show me, too, the big cities and rivers and the sea, won't you ? "

" Yes," answered the quail, forcing herself not to cry.

In this way the summer passed. Peasants came with ploughs to plough up the stubble, the quail and her children removed to a neighbouring field of

maize; after a time men came to gather in the maize. They cut the straw and hoed up the ground, then the quails retired to the rough grass by the edge of the plantation.

The long, beautiful days gave place to short and gloomy ones, the weather began to grow foggy and the leaves of the plantation withered. In the evening, belated swallows could be seen flying low along the ground, sometimes other flocks of birds of passage passed and, in the stillness of the frosty nights, the cry of the cranes could be heard, all migrating in the same direction, towards the south.

A bitter struggle took place in the heart of the poor quail. She would fain have torn herself in two, that one half might go with her strong children who began to suffer from the cold as the autumn advanced, and the other half remain with the injured chick which clung to her so desperately. One day, without any warning, the north-east wind blew a dangerous blast, and that decided her. Better that one of the fledgelings should die than that all of them should—and without looking back lest her resolution should weaken, she soared away with the strong little birds, while the wounded one called piteously :

"Do not desert me ! Do not desert me ! "

He tried to rise after them, but could not, and remained on the same spot following them with his eyes until they were lost to sight on the southern horizon.

Three days later, the whole region was clothed in winter's white, cold garb. The violent snow-storm was followed by a calm as clear as crystal, accompanied by a severe frost.

. . . . .

On the edge of the plantation lay a young quail with a broken wing and stiff with cold. After a period of great suffering he had fallen into a pleasant state of semi-consciousness. Through his mind flashed fragments of things seen—the stubble-field, the leg of a boot with an ant crawling upon it, his mother's warm wings. He turned over from one side to the other and lay dead with his little claws pressed together as though in an act of devotion.

POPA TANDA

By I. Slavici

GOD have mercy on the soul of Schoolmaster Pintilie! He was a good man, and a well-known chorister. He was very fond of salad with vinegar. Whenever he was hoarse, he would drink the yolk of an egg with it; when he raised his voice, the windows rattled while he sang, "Oh, Lord, preserve Thy people." He was schoolmaster in Butucani, a fine, large town containing men of position and sound sense, and given to almsgiving and hospitality. Now Schoolmaster Pintilie had only two children: a daughter married to Petrea Tzapu, and Trandafir, Father Trandafir, priest in Saraceni.

God keep Father Trandafir! He was a good man, he had studied many books, and he sang even better than his dead father, God have mercy on his soul! He always spoke correctly and carefully as though he were reading out of a book. Father Trandafir was an industrious, careful man. He gathered from many sources, and made something out of nothing. He saved, he mended, he collected to get enough for himself and for others.

Father Trandafir went through a great deal in his youth. One does not achieve big results in a minute or two. The poor man has to go without a great deal more than he ever gets. He worked harder with his brain than with a spade and fork. But what he did was not work thrown away. Young Trandafir became priest in his native town, in Butucani, a fine large town containing men of position and good sense, but Trandafir did not enjoy the almsgiving and hospitality.

Father Trandafir would have been a wonderful man had not one thing spoilt him. He was too severe in his speech, too harsh in his judgments; he was too straightforward and outspoken. He never minded his words, but said right out what he had in his mind. It is not good to be a man like that. Men take offence if you speak too plainly to them, and it is best to live peaceably with the world. This was evident in Father Trandafir's case. A man like him could not stay two years in Butucani. It was first one thing, then another; at one time he complained to the townspeople, the next time to the archdeacon. Now it is well known that priests must not make complaints to the archdeacon. The archdeacon understands presents much better than complaints. But that was what Father Trandafir would not comprehend.

There is no doubt that Father Trandafir was in the right.

But the thing is, right is the prerogative of the

mighty. The weak can only assert themselves gradually. The ant cannot overthrow the mountain. It can, though, change its position; but slowly, slowly, bit by bit. Perhaps the Father knew that this was so in the world; he had his own standard, though.

"Even the devil cannot turn what is true and right into a lie!" This was his remark, and with this remark he got himself turned out of Butucani. That is to say, it was not only he who did it, it was the townspeople too. One word and a little something besides to promote a good understanding with the archdeacon, a visit to the bishop, and a word there from the archdeacon: things get done if one knows how to do them. The long and the short of it was that Father Trandafir was sent from Butucani to Saraceni—to promote a good understanding among the faithful. Priest in Saraceni! Who knows what that means to be priest in Saraceni? That is what befell Father Trandafir! Who would fain leap the ditch throws his bag over it first. Father Trandafir only had a wife and two children; his bag was empty. That was why he leaped so unwillingly from Butucani to Saraceni.

In the "Dry Valley" there was a village which they called "Saraceni." A village called "poor" in a "dry" valley; could any place have a more unpleasant name?

The Dry Valley!

"Valley" because the place was shut in between

mountains; "dry," because the stream, which had cut its way through the middle of the valley, was dry most of the year.

This was how the valley lies.

To the right stood a hill called "Rîpoasa." On the left were three other hills, called "Fatza," "Grofnitza," and "Alunish." Rîpoasa was rocky. Fatza was cultivated; the village stood on Grofnitza, while on Alunish lay the village graveyard among hazel and birch trees. Thus it lay to right and left, but the chief feature of the landscape stood at the bottom. Here rose the mountains—from there, came what did come.

The other side, beyond Rîpoasa was the Rapitza Valley—a much deeper valley than the Dry Valley, and so called because the Rapitza flowed through it. The Rapitza was a treacherous river, especially in the spring, and the stream in the Dry Valley was a branch of the Rapitza. In the spring, when the snow melted on the mountains, the Rapitza got angry and poured part of her fury into the branch that flowed through the Dry Valley, and the latter ceased to be "dry."

In a few hours the inhabitants of Saraceni were rather too rich in water. This occurred nearly every year. When the crops in the valley appeared to be most favourable, the Dry Valley belied its name and washed away all that lay in its path.

It would have been rather better if this invasion had lasted only a short time, but the water remained

in the valley, and in many places formed refuges for the frog family. And instead of corn, osiers and interlacing willows grew by the side of its pools.

Was it any wonder that in consequence of this the people of Saraceni had become in time the most idle of men? He is a fool who sows where he cannot reap, or where he does not know whether he will be able to reap or not. The Fatza was a sandy spot; the corn grew a few inches high and the maize a yard; on Rîpoasa one could not grow blackberries even, for at the bottom the water spoilt the fruit. Where there is no hope of reward there is no incentive to work. Whoever works wants to earn, but the people of Saraceni had given up all thoughts of gain, and therefore no one felt inspired to work. Those who could afford it passed their time lying out of doors; those who could not, spent their day working in the neighbouring villages. When the winter came life was hard and bitter.

But whoever has got used to the bad does not think of better things; the people of Saraceni appeared to think that things could not be better than they were. Fish in the water, birds in the air, moles in the ground, and the people of Saraceni in poverty!

Saraceni? One can imagine what a village like Saraceni must have been; here a house, there a house—all alike. Hedges were superfluous, seeing there was nothing to enclose; the street was the

whole village. It would have been absurd to put a chimney on the house—the smoke found its way out through the roof. There would have been no sense in putting plaster on the walls either, as that dropped off in time. Some of the buildings were made of bits of wood knocked together, a roof of straw mixed with hay, an oven of clay, an old-fashioned veranda outside, a bed with four posts built into the ground, a door made out of three boards held together by two stakes placed cross-wise—quickly made and well made—whoever was not pleased with it, let him make something he liked better.

At the top of the village, that is to say on the highest point, was a sort of building which the Saracenese called the "church." It was a heap of old tree trunks piled one on the top of the other in the form of walls. In the old days—when, one does not know—these kind of walls were open to the sky ; later, one does not know when, the walls had been made to converge in one place, to support what was supposed to do duty for a tower. This—owing to the fact that the supports of the façade had perished through the buffeting of a very strong wind—had fallen towards the patient earth, dragging the entire structure after it. And there it had remained ever since, for the church counted for little in Saraceni ; it was superfluous.

Priest ? They say there is no village without a priest. Probably whoever said this did not know

about Saraceni. Saraceni was a village without a priest. That is to say, it was a village with a priest —only this priest was a priest without a village. Saraceni was unique in one way. There had never been a priest who stayed more than three days in Saraceni ; he came one day, stayed the next, and left on the third. Many guilty priests passed through Saraceni ; whoever had stayed there long would have expiated all his sins.

Then Father Trandafir reached this penitential spot. He could not expect to do as the others had done, come one day, stay the next, and depart the third. He was too much out of favour with the archdeacon to imagine that he would send him to another village. He could not remain without a village : a priest without a village—a cart without a wheel, a yoke without oxen, a hat on the top of a wig. He began to think what he must do ; he must take things as they were, and stay gladly in Saraceni. It was only a village in name, but no one could say he was a priest without a village. But really a more suitable priest for a more suitable village you could not have found. The poverty of the priest corresponded to the poverty in the homes of his parishioners. From the beginning Trandafir realized one thing : it was much nicer in Butucani than in Saraceni. There the people all had something, and you could always have some of it. In Saraceni all the latches were made of wood. Then the Father reflected : the priest did all the

business of the town, but the town took care of the priest's purse. Before long the Father began to feel sure that the people who started by being charitable and hospitable were not born fools. "It is a wise thing when men meet together to comfort and cheer each other. Even our Redeemer began with almsgiving, and the wedding at Cana of Galilee." Thus thought Father Trandafir; but in Saraceni there was neither almsgiving nor hospitality.

"There is one thing," said the Father to himself a little later on, "in a poor village there is no corn for the priest to gather. As long as the people of Saraceni are lazy, so long shall I be hungry!" And he began to think how he was going to make his parishioners industrious. The industrious man eats the stones, makes soup out of the stagnant water, and reaps corn where the hemlock used to grow. "Then"—concluded the priest—"when the cow has fodder she is no longer dry!"

Thus he spoke, and he set to work to put it in practice. A man who has nothing to eat busies himself with other people's affairs. He does no good that way! The blind man cannot aid the cripple; the hungry don't improve their village; when the geese keep watch among the vegetables, little remains for the gardener: but Father Trandafir was obstinate; when he started, he went on—and he got there, or he died by the way.

The first Sunday Father Trandafir preached before the people, who had assembled in consider-

able numbers to see the new priest. There is nothing more agreeable to a man who desires the welfare of others than to see his words making an impression. A good thought multiplies itself, penetrating many hearts, and whoever possesses it and passes it on, if he values it, rejoices to see it gaining ground in the world. Father Trandafir felt happy that day. Never before had he been listened to with such attention as on this occasion. It seemed as though these people were listening to something which they knew but which they did not understand well. They drank in his words with such eagerness, it was as though they wanted to read his very soul the better to understand his teaching. That day he read the gospel of "The Prodigal Son." Father Trandafir showed how God, in His unending love for man, had created him to be happy. Having placed man in the world, God wishes him to enjoy all the innocent pleasures of life, for only so will he learn to love life and live charitably with his neighbours. The man who, through his own fault or owing to other causes, only feels the bitterness and sorrow of this world cannot love life; and, not loving it, he despises in a sinful manner the great gift of God.

What kind of people are the lazy people, the people who make no effort, who do not stretch out a hand to take this gift? They are sinners! They have no desires—only carnal appetites. Man has been given pure desires which he may gratify with

the fruit of his labours ; longings are put into his heart that he may conquer the world while God Himself contemplates him with pleasure from on high. To work is the first duty of man ; and he who does not work is a sinner.

After this, the Father sketched in words which seemed to give life to his ideas the miserable existence of a man perishing from hunger, and he gave his faithful hearers the thoughts which had germinated in his own intelligent brain—how they must work in the spring and in the summer, in the autumn and in the winter.

The people had listened ; the Father's words were written on their faces ; going home they could only talk of what they had heard in church, and each one felt himself more of a man than before.

Maybe there were many among them who only waited for Sunday to pass that they might begin their first day of work.

"There has never been such a priest in Saraceni!" said Marcu Flori Cucu, as he parted from his neighbour, Mitru.

"A priest that does honour to a village," replied Mitru, as if he felt that his village was not exactly honoured.

Other Sundays followed. Father Trandafir was ready with his sermon. The second Sunday he had no one to address. The weather was wet, and people stayed at home. Other Sundays the weather was fine ; probably then the people did not remember

in time; they were loath to part from God's blue sky. And so the Father only had in church some old woman or some aged man with failing sight and deaf ears. Sometimes there was only Cozonac, the bell-ringer. In this way he made no progress. Had he been a different kind of man he would have stopped here.

But Father Trandafir was like the goat among cabbages in the garden. When you turn it out at the door, it comes in through the fence, when you mend the fence, it jumps over it, and does a lot more damage by destroying the top of the hedge.

God keep him! Father Trandafir still remained a good man.

"Wait!" he said. "If you will not come to me, I will go to you!"

Then the priest went from door to door. He never ceased talking from the moment it was light. Whenever he came across anyone he gave him good advice. You met the priest in the fields; you found him on the hill; if you went down the valley you encountered the priest; the priest was in the woods. The priest was in church; the priest was at the death-bed; the priest was at the wedding; the priest was with your next-door neighbour—you had to fly the village if you wanted to escape the priest. And whenever he met you, he gave you wise counsel.

During a whole year, Father Trandafir gave good advice. People listened gladly—they liked to stay and talk to the priest even if he did give them

good advice. All the same, the old saying holds good: men know what they ought to do, but they don't do it. The Father was disappointed. After a certain time he ceased to give advice. There was not a man in the village upon whom he had not poured the whole weight of his learning: he had nothing more to say.

"This will not do," said the priest once more. "Advice does not pay. I must start something more severe."

He began to chaff.

Wherever he found a man, Father Trandafir began to make him ridiculous, to make fun of him in every kind of way. If he passed a house that had not been re-roofed yesterday, he would say to the owner: "Oh, you are a clever man, you are! You have windows in the roof. You do love the light and the blessed sun!" If he found a woman in a dirty blouse: "Look at me! Since when have you taken to wearing stuff dresses?"

If he met an unwashed child: "Listen, good wife, you must have a lot of plum jam if you can plaster your children with it!" And if he came across a man lying in the shade he would say to him, "Good luck with your work! Good luck with your work!" If the man got up, he would beg him not to stop work, for his children's sake.

He began like this, but he carried it altogether too far. It got to such a pitch that the people did their utmost to get out of the priest's way. He

became a perfect pest. The worst thing about it was that the people nicknamed him "Popa Tanda" because he chaffed them so. And "Popa Tanda" he has remained ever since.

To tell the truth, it was only in one way the people did not like the priest. Each one was ready to laugh at the others with the priest; no one was pleased, though, when the others laughed at him. That is human; every one is ready to saddle his neighbour's mare. In that way, Father Trandafir pleased his parishioners, but he was not content himself. Before the year was out, every man in the village had become a tease; there was not a person left of whom to make fun, and in the end the wags began to laugh at themselves. That put an end to it. Only one thing remained to do: the village to make fun of the priest.

Two whole years passed without Trandafir being able to stir up the people, even when he had passed from advising them to annoying them. They became either givers of advice or they were teasers: all day they stood in groups, some of them giving advice, others joking. It was a wonderful affair; the people recognized the right, despised the bad; but nothing altered them.

"Eh! say now, didn't Father Trandafir mind? Didn't he get angry, very angry?"

He did get wild. He began to abuse the people. As he had proceeded to advise them, and to chaff them, so now he proceeded to abuse them.

Whenever he got hold of a man, he abused him. But he did not get far with this. At first the people allowed themselves to be insulted. Later on, they began to answer back, on the sly, as it were. Finally, thinking it was going too far, they began to abuse the priest.

From now on, things got a little involved. Everything went criss-cross. The people began to tell the priest that if he did not leave off laughing at them, and insulting them, they would go to the bishop and get him removed from the village. That is what the priest deserved. The people had hit on the very thing! Throw him out of Saraceni! The priest began to curse in earnest. Off he went; the people got in to their carts to go to the archdeacon, and from the archdeacon to the bishop.

In the Book of Wisdom, concerning the life of this world, there is a short sentence which says: our well-wishers are often our undoing and our evil-wishers are useful to us. Father Trandafir was not lucky in getting good out of his evil-wishers. The bishop was a good soul, worthy of being put in all the calendars all over the face of the earth. He took pity on the poor priest, said he was in the right, and scolded the people.

And so Popa Tanda stayed in Saraceni.

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Misfortunes generally heap themselves upon mankind. One gives rise to another, or are they,

perhaps, inseparable ? Anyhow, they are always like light and shade, one alongside the other.

By now Father Trandafir had three children. When he returned from the bishop, he found his wife in bed. There was a fourth little blessing in the house. A sick wife, three little children, a fourth at the breast, and a tumble-down house ; the snow drifted through the walls, the stove smoked, the wind came through the roof, the granary was bare, his purse empty, and his heart heavy.

Father Trandafir was not the man to find a way out of this embarrassing state of things. Had it been some one else in his situation, he could have helped him : he could not comfort himself. For a long time he stood in the dim light of the little lamp ; every one around him slept. The sick woman was asleep. Now there is nothing more conducive to melancholy than the sight of people asleep. He loved those sleeping forms ; he loved them and was responsible for their happiness ; he lived for them, and their love made life precious to him. Thoughts crowded into his brain. His mind turned to the past and to the future ; considering the state in which he found himself, the future could only appear depicted in the saddest colours. His children ! His wife ! What would become of them ? His heart was heavy, and he could not find one consoling thought, one single loop-hole of escape ; nowhere in the world was there anything to give him a gleam of hope.

The next day was Sunday. The Father went to church with bowed head, to read Matins.

Like the generality of mankind, Father Trandafir had never given much thought to what he was doing. He was a priest, and he was content with his lot. He liked to sing, to read the Gospel, to instruct the faithful, to comfort, and to give spiritual assistance to the erring. His thoughts did not go much beyond that. Had he been asked at any time whether he realized the sanctity, the inner meaning of his calling, maybe he would have laughed to himself at all those things which a man only grasps in moments of intense suffering. It is man's nature when his mind comprehends a series of more or less deep thoughts, to measure the whole world by this standard, and not to believe what he does not understand. But man does not always think in this way. There are events during which his brain becomes inactive: in danger, when no escape seems possible; in moments of joy, when he knows not from what source his happiness is derived; at times when his train of thought seems to have lost all coherence. Then, when man has reached, in any way, the point where the possible becomes indistinguishable from the impossible, he ceases to reason, instinct asserts itself.

Father Trandafir went into the church. How many times had he not entered that church! Just as a blacksmith might enter his forge. But this time he was seized with an incomprehensible fear, he

took a few steps forward and then hid his face in his hands and began to sob bitterly. Why did he cry? Before whom did he cry? His lips uttered these words only: "Almighty God, succour me!" Did he believe that this prayer, expressed with all the energy of despair, could bring him help? He believed nothing; he thought of nothing; he was in a state of exaltation.

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The Holy Scriptures teach us that just as the ploughman lives on the fruit of his toil, so does the spiritual pastor, who serves the altar, live by the result of his service at that altar. Father Trandafir always believed in the Holy Scriptures; he always worked only for the spiritual welfare of his people, and expected that they, in return, would furnish him with his daily bread. But the world is not always in agreement with what is written and commanded; only the priest agreed with it, the people did not. The Father got little from his office, anyhow not enough; this is to say, four pieces of ground near the village, a poll-tax on the population, and baptismal and burying fees.

Taken altogether, it amounted to nothing, seeing that the earth produced scarcely anything, the poll-tax existed only in name, the new-born were baptized for nothing, and the dead were buried gratis by the priest.

Near the church was a deserted house; a house in name only. The owner of the house could have

kept cattle, but he had no beasts. By the side of the house there was room for a garden, but there was no garden because, as we have already said, there were no fences in Saraceni. Father Trandafir bought the whole place and lived in it. As the house belonged to the priest, nothing much was done to put it in order, and it was quite dilapidated, the walls had holes in them, there were rents in the roof. The Father only troubled himself about other people's houses.

The priest's table was no better than the house. According to the old saying, man follows the ways of other men even when he wants to make them follow his own : the priest lived like the rest of the village. Happily he had his wife's dowry, but often one does not try to get help from just the place where it is to be had. The season of Lent drew near.

"It will not do!" said Father Trandafir. "This will not do!" And he began to do as the rest of the world does, to occupy himself first and foremost with the care of his own house.

Directly the spring-time came, he hired a gipsy, and set him to work to plaster the house with clay. In a few days all four walls were firmly plastered. After that, the priest enjoyed sitting outside more than inside the house, because you could not see the walls of the house so well from within ; a plastered house was a fine thing in Saraceni, especially when one could say to oneself, "That is mine!" There was one thing, though, which was not as it should

be. Every time the Father's eyes fell upon the sides of the roof he went indoors—he felt he had seen enough. He did not want to see the defective roof, but every time he wanted to look at the walls he had to see the roof. That damned roof! It could no longer be left like that.

Down in the valley where there are numerous pools, not only willows and osiers grew, but here and there were to be found sedges and rushes, cat's-tail and a species of reed. "That is what I will do!" thought the priest. He engaged a man, and sent him out to cut sedges and rushes and cat's-tail and reeds. One Saturday the house was surrounded by bundles tied with osiers; and the following Saturday the roof was mended and edged on the top with bundles of reeds over which were stretched two strips of wood fastened with cross pieces. The work was good, and not dear. People passed by the priest's house nodding their heads and saying, "The priest is one of the devil's own men." Now the priest could stay happily outside.

But this happiness did not last long. There was still one thing that was not quite right. The priest felt that he was too much in the open. There was no other house in the village like his, and it would have been better a little separated from the village. The Father hardly liked to say "At my place," when "my place" was "in the village." There must be a fence, and a gate for the people to enter by, when they came to see the priest; it might

be a fence in name only, and the gate only a hurdle, but it must be an understood thing that before anyone could enter the priest's house he must cross the priest's yard. Once more the priest hired a man and sent him to cut briars and stakes. He fixed the stakes into the ground, and placed the briars between them, and there was the fence, ready made. In front of the house, in the direction of the church, about half an acre of ground was enclosed : the gate was formed by four poles fastened by two others placed crosswise. The priest's wife especially rejoiced at being thus shut in, and the priest rejoiced when he saw his wife's pleasure. There was not a day on which either the priest or his wife did not say to the children : "Listen ! you are not to go outside the yard ; play quietly at home."

Once a man starts, he never gets to the end. One desire gives rise to another. Now the priest's wife got an idea in her head.

"Do you know, Father," she said one morning, "I think it would be a good plan to make a few beds for vegetables by the side of the fence."

"Vegetable-beds ?"

"Yes ; we can sow onions, carrots, haricot beans, potatoes, and cabbages."

The Father was astonished. To him that seemed quite beyond their powers. Vegetable-beds in Saraceni !

For a few days his head was full of vegetable-beds, of potatoes, cabbages, and haricot beans ; and

a few days after that, the ground was already dug up and the beds were ready. Not a day passed on which the priest and his wife did not go about ten times to the beds to see if the seeds were growing. Great was the joy one day. The priest had risen very early.

"Wife, get up!"

"What's the matter?"

"They have sprouted."

The priest and his wife and all the children spent the whole day squatting by the beds. The more seeds they saw appear above the ground, the happier they were.

And again the villagers passed by the priest's house and looked through the thorns at the priest's vegetable-beds, and they said once more, "The priest is one of the devil's own men!"

"Listen, wife," said the priest. "Wouldn't it be a good plan to sow maize along the fence and round the beds?"

"Indeed it would! I like fresh maize!"

"So do I, especially when it's roasted on the embers!"

Here was a new task! The priest surrounded himself with maize. He laughed with pleasure when he thought how pretty it would be when the maize grew up all round and shut out the briars on the fence which had begun to offend his eyes. But there is the old proverb, "Much wants more." At the back of the house was another strip of ground,

about four times the size of the bit they had cultivated. The priest could not get it out of his head. Why should this land lie fallow? Couldn't he plant maize at the back of the house too? In the fields opposite, men were ploughing and sowing, the ground was untouched still in the village because it was the village.

Marcu Flori Cucu, the priest's neighbour, had a plough; it was rather dilapidated, but it was a plough, and Mitru Catamush, Marcu's neighbour, had two feeble oxen and a foundered horse. The priest, Marcu, Mitru, the oxen and the horse, worked all one day from morn till eve. The ground was ploughed up and sown with maize. From thenceforward, the priest was happier when he was at the back of the house.

It was a wonderful and beautiful bit of work—what furrows! And here and there among the furrows a blade of maize peeped out. In spite of this, the priest scratched himself once or twice, and then fairly often, behind the ear. It seemed as though something still weighed upon his mind. It was a difficult matter, which he hardly dare take in hand: the glebe lands. Up to now, they had been neglected; at present, he did not know what to do with them. He would have liked to work them himself. He would have liked to see his own men sowing them; he would have liked to take his wife there in the autumn. It was very tempting. He talked a great deal to his wife

about the matter. They would need horses, a cart, a plough, a labourer, stables—they would want a quantity of things. Moreover, the priest did not understand agriculture.

However, the vegetable-beds were growing green, the maize was springing up. The priest made up his mind ; he took the residue of his wife's dowry and set to work. Marcu's plough was good enough to start with. The priest bought one horse from Mitru ; a man in the Rapitza Valley had another one ; Stan Schiopu had a cart with three wheels. The priest bought it as he got a wheel from Mitru, to make up for the horse being foundered.

Cozonac, the bell-ringer, engaged himself as labourer to the priest, for his house was only a stone's throw away. The priest drove four posts into the ground at one end of the house, two long ones and two short, and he made three sides of plaited osiers and a roof of rushes, and there was the stable all ready.

During these days, Father Trandafir had aged by about ten years ; but he grew young again when he placed his wife and children in the cart, whipped up the horses, and drove off to see their ploughed land.

The villagers saw him, and shook their heads, and said once more : "The priest is the devil's own man."

The priest's wife had her own feminine worries. She had a beautiful Icon which had been given to

her by the son of the priest at Vezura. At present the Icon was lying at the bottom of a box wrapped up in paper. For a long time she had wished to place it between the windows, to put flowers and sweet basil round it, and look at it often ; because this Icon represented the Holy Virgin, and the priest's daughter was called Mary. But the walls were dirty and the Icon had no case. There was another thing that annoyed the priest's wife : one window was filled in with a pig's bladder, and in the other were three broken panes mended with paper. The house was rather dark.

Easter drew near. There were only five days to Holy Week. If the priest wanted to spend Easter with his wife, he had still three important things to get : whitewash for the walls, windows for the house, and a case for the Icon of the most Blessed Virgin—all objects that could be found only in a town.

To the market, then !

The priest had horses and a cart. He was vexed about the osier baskets for the maize ; only the backs and sides of them still remained. He was ashamed that a priest like himself should have to go to the market without any maize-baskets. He could not borrow any, seeing he was at Saraceni, where even the priest had no proper maize-baskets.

They say " Necessity is the best teacher." The Father sent Cozonac down the valley to fetch osiers, planted two stakes in the ground with thinner sticks

set between them about a hand's breadth apart, and then the priest and his wife and children, and Cozonac too, began to plait the osiers in. Before long the baskets were ready. The work was not very remarkable, but for all that they were the best baskets in Saraceni, and so good that Cozonac could not refrain from saying, "The priest is one of the devil's own men!"

To the market-place and from the market-place home the Father went proudly with his baskets; other people had some, but he found people could buy worse baskets than those he had made himself.

"What is the priest making?"

"Baskets for the maize."

"But he has got some."

"He is making them for those who have not got any."

After Easter, Cozonac began to clear the pools of osiers which the priest wove into baskets. The longer the work continued, the better was it done; the last basket was always the best.

Marcu Flori Cucu was a sensible man. He liked to stay and talk to the priest. Cozonac cleared the osiers, the priest plaited them, while Marcu lay upon his stomach with his head in his hands and idly watched.

"This osier is a little too long," said the priest, measuring the osier with his eye. "Here, Marcu! Give me the hatchet to make it shorter."

The hatchet was at Marcu's feet. Marcu raised

the upper part of his body, supported himself on his elbows, stretched out his legs, and began feeling about for the hatchet, trying to draw it up by his feet.

"Make haste!" said the priest, and gave him a cut with the osier.

Marcu jumped up and assured the priest that he was much more nimble than he thought. In the end, this assurance was of great use to him. By Whitsuntide the priest had a cart-load of baskets ready to take to the market, and Marcu knew very well that if the priest sold the baskets he would have a cheerful holiday.

The priest had had help for some weeks, and the help had always brought a reward to the man who had given it.

Just before Whitsuntide the rain began, and seemed as though it would never cease.

"I do not know what I shall do," said the priest. "It seems as though I must leave the market until after Whitsuntide. I do not like going in the rain. If it does not stop raining by Thursday, I just shall not go."

Marcu scratched himself behind his ears and said nothing. He could see that it did not suit the priest to get soaked.

"Here," he said a little later, ceasing to plait, "couldn't we weave an awning? There are reeds and rushes and osiers in the valley."

"Perhaps you are right," replied the priest.

"It could be made the same way as we are making these."

Through helping him, Marcu had learnt to make better baskets than the priest. The awning did Marcu great credit, the priest did not get wet and came back from the market with a full purse.

This time Whit-Sunday was fine. The priest's wife had a new gown, the three eldest children had dolls bought in the town; the tiny one, Mary, had a straw hat with two pink flowers, the walls were white both inside and out, the windows were whole, the house was light, and the Icon of the Holy Virgin could be seen very well placed high up between the windows, decorated with flowers grown along the edge of the vegetable-beds. The priest had brought white flour, meat, butter, and even sugar, from the town. The priest loved his wife, but it was not his way to kiss her at odd times. But, this morning, the first thing he did was to embrace her. His wife began to cry—I don't know why—when Father Trandafir entered the church he felt inclined to cry; he had seen people in front of the Icon and there were tears in his eyes when he went up to the altar. The people say he had never sung more beautifully than he did that day. The saying remained: "To sing like the priest at Whitsuntide!"

The parishioners went to see the priest; they passed through the gate before they crossed the door-step; they wiped their boots, put their hats

on their sticks, leaned their sticks against the wall, smoothed their moustaches and their beards, and stepped inside. When they came out of the house again, they took a look round, nodded their heads, and said nothing.

. . . . .

The years come, the years go ; the world moves on, and man is sometimes at peace with the world, and sometimes at odds with it. The high road passed through the town, passed by the Dry Valley and ran farther on to the Rapitza Valley. Where the roads met, at the conjunction of the two valleys, there was a mill on the Rapitza. Near Rapitza was a cross ; close to the cross was a fountain, and by the fountain were eight fine sycamores. This spot was called "The Cross of Saraceni." From here to Saraceni was only about an hour by road. In spite of this, whenever he came from the town, the man of Saraceni pulled up here to water his horse, and waited a while, hoping that some wayfarer might come and ask : "What village is that where one sees that beautiful church with white walls and the glittering tower ?" And when he is asked, he strokes his moustache, and looking proudly towards the place replies : "Up there on the Grofnitza ? That's our village—Saraceni ; but you ought to hear the bells—what bells that tower contains ! One can hear them a three hours' journey away !"

Where the road divided there stood a sign-post with two arms ; on one arm was written, "To the

Rapitza Valley," and on the other one, " Towards the Dry Valley." There was no road anywhere round about like the one that ran through the Dry Valley towards Saraceni.

It was as smooth as a table, and as solid as a cherry-stone. One could see the Saracenese had constructed it lovingly. To right and left, at intervals of ten to fifteen paces, were some shady nut-trees which were a pleasure to look at. The river-bed lay on the right ; the road ran along its bank, but higher up, so that the water could not disturb it. The Saracenese had to destroy rock in their progress, but that they did cheerfully, for out of the rock they built the road.

From here on, the Saracene felt at home, and drove at a foot's pace. But he was not bored for a second. At every step almost he met an acquaintance with whom he exchanged words, " Where do you come from ? " and " Where are you going ? " One man had a cart full of lime, another a load of apples ; then came a man carrying a trellis-work, and another with a wheelbarrow, a stave, or some other article made of wood.

From time to time, along the side of the road, one found the stone-masons at work, their trowels ringing from daybreak till sunset. This road was not a dreary one !

There were lime-kilns where the road ran along the valley. In one place there was a whole village. Some men were loading up lime, others

unloading stone and wood ; the masons were shaping the stones, the men at the kilns were throwing wood on to the fires ; the foremen were making noise enough for five.

From this point one could see the village well. The gardens were full of trees ; only between the bushes or beyond the trees did one catch a glimpse here and there of a bit of the walls or the roofs of the houses. The priest's house was just up by the church ; one could only see five windows and a red roof with two chimney stacks. Opposite the church stood the school. The house, of which one could only see a piece of wall with two windows and a roof, belonged to Marcu Flori Cucu.

The big building visible lower down was the Town Hall. If the houses had lain less closely together the village would have looked very beautiful, but, as it was, one only caught a glimpse and must imagine the rest.

Every one had changed ; Father Trandafir only had remained the same : fresh, gay, and busy. If his grey hair and grizzled beard had not betrayed his age, we might have thought that the little children with whom he played in the evening, on the seat in front of the house, were his own. One of them, whom he had lifted up to kiss, stole his hat from off his head and ran away with it. Mariuca opened the window and called out :

"My little Trandafir, don't leave grandfather bareheaded."

Then she flew from the window to catch Ileana, who had stolen her grandmother's bonnet and adorned herself with it, and was now proudly showing herself to her grandfather. The old grandfather laughed heartily, he loved a joke. From close by came Father Costa, and caught first Ileana and then Mariuca, kissed them, and then seated himself by his father-in-law's side. Marcu, neighbour and old friend, Mariuca's father-in-law, and attached to the house, saw the group and came to join in the conversation.

"Old man, take your hat; you must not sit there bare-headed," said the grandmother, handing his hat through the window.

One of the villagers, in passing, wished him "Good night," and added to himself, "May the Lord preserve him for many years, for he is one of God's own men."

OUT IN THE WORLD

By Ion Popovici-Banatzeanu

THE man tramping along the broad, dusty highway gradually drew near to a town. He carried a bundle on his back—some old clothes, a change of underlinen and a pair of boots—and at his breast, wrapped up in a handkerchief, were his certificate of baptism, his work-book and his book of military service—all his worldly goods.

For three years he had served the Emperor, and failing to find employment in the town where he was, with a stick in his hand and a few coppers in his pocket he had set out into the world, and walked with the steadiness of a man well acquainted with the road.

Some one had advised him to go to Lugosh; he had heard there were many craftsmen there driving a big trade, and he pursued his way with hope in his heart. He felt strong and eager to work. For three years he had not seen a workshop, for three years he had not followed the craft which he had learnt so lovingly; it seemed to him he would hardly know how to handle a hide now. Yet

with each step forward his confidence in himself increased, and he thought, "I will work, and work so that every one wonders, and the peasant who takes in his hand the sandals I have tanned will never want to part with them." And when he said this to himself he walked faster. He would have liked to fly that he might arrive quicker. But then again he slackened his pace, and other thoughts assailed him: supposing he did not get a situation, what would he do then?

"Supposing I do not find work?"

He was afraid to answer this or to think of what he would do if he did not get a place. Ah, just to find work with somebody. He comforted himself, and putting away from him all sad thoughts he imagined a rosy future. He saw himself in the workshop doing the work of seven, and saving penny after penny; he saw himself buying first one skin, then two, then three, six and more, and many more, until he had a workshop of his own, and then, if he met a girl he liked, he would marry.

He was intoxicated by his own thoughts, and hardly knew where he was going. He walked slowly with his head bent. He would not rest, for he felt no fatigue; it was as though some one urged him forward.

It was late autumn, the fields were bare and the road dreary. Buffeted by the wind, the poplars along the side of the road were shedding their leaves, and sadly swaying their pointed tops.

The country lay barren and dead, while the voiceless hills were glowing in the light of the setting sun like a man who, on the point of death, tries to save himself by some final remedy. The outlines of solitary fountains prolonged themselves mournfully against the horizon, as though they regretted the life and gaiety of other days. A flight of crows, frightened by I know not what, rose from the dark marshes and alighted upon the tops of the poplars, beating their wings and cawing above the waste.

But Sandu saw and heard nothing; he walked absorbed in himself and communing with his own heart.

He entered the town as the lights were being lit. He took no side turnings but kept to the main street so that the dogs should not hinder him.

"Keep straight on," he said to himself, "past the Roumanian church, then I take the turning to the right till I get to the bridge and at the bridge I must ask my way."

And at the bridge he asked his way, but they explained it in such a manner that he lost himself, and it was late before he reached the hostel. He bade good evening and asked rather diffidently whether there were anywhere he could sleep, and if there were something to eat.

The innkeeper entered into conversation with him, and learnt that Sandu came from the Dobre

district, had done three years' military service, and now was looking for a situation with some tanner.

"I have come," Sandu spoke with difficulty, "to see if I can find a place here, for you see——"

"Who knows, perhaps you may," the innkeeper interrupted him, and went out of the room.

"Should you say I shall find a place?" Sandu asked the innkeeper as he brought him some lard and a piece of bread.

"Oh, you may find one if you are good at your trade and hard-working."

Sandu said nothing; the only word he could have uttered would have been to say, as he could have said, how hard he meant to work, and what kind of a man he was. But as he could not say this to the innkeeper he told himself what a lot of work he meant to do, and how well he meant to behave himself, as well as if he were a young girl.

Absorbed in thought, he ate at long intervals, and the innkeeper, seeing how silent he was, bade him put out the lamp and wished him a good night.

But the night was not restful. He crossed himself and stretched himself out on the bench by the side of the wall, his bundle he placed at his head and carefully pushed his money and his papers underneath it. Although he was tired from his tramp, sleep would not visit his eyes. He grew excited, a sort of giddiness overcame him, and he broke into a cold sweat at his own thoughts. He

tossed and turned on the narrow bench, and pressed his forehead against the cold wall as he sighed heavily.

When the day broke he was exhausted, his bones seemed weak, his feet could hardly support him, and his head felt queer. Water, and the freshness of the early morning, revived him, and he made his way to the market-place where, according to the innkeeper, he would find the booths of the master-tanners.

Although it was autumn, people were in no hurry to buy sandals, and only a few of the master-tanners, who did business here on Sundays, were walking about and moving their strips of leather according to the position of the sun so as to ensure them being in the shade.

Sandu stood still by the cross in the market-place, and it seemed as if a knife went through his heart; when he saw the empty booths he felt as though his last atom of will had been destroyed. He felt as though he must turn back, as though he could not ask. It seemed to him as though he had not the strength to bear hearing one of the tanners tell him he had no place for him; it would be such a catastrophe that he would sink into the earth.

Not knowing what he did he moved forward; but when he approached the first booth he lost confidence, and had not the courage to greet the master.

He passed on. He walked round the booths

two or three times, but could not summon up courage to ask whether one of the tanners had a situation open or not.

"Now I will go," he said very firmly to himself, to give himself strength, but when he moved he saw a peasant go up to the booth. "I will let him make his purchase and then I will go."

But he did not stir, he was afraid, especially when the master, not being able to come to terms with the peasant, undid the box, and flung the sandals violently into it. He did nothing; it seemed terrible to him to have to go up to the booth. He did not know why. He felt angry with himself that it should be so. And as he asked himself why he was like this, he recalled to mind various acquaintances who were so very bold and fearless. If only he could be like that! But he could not be so, his nature did not allow it.

"Now you good-for-nothing, you are wandering about here like a sheep in a pen," a tanner, small of stature, with brown eyes and a harsh voice, said roughly to him.

"I?" stammered Sandu. "I am not a good-for-nothing."

"No? Then why do you keep coming round? Haven't I seen you? You walk a bit, you stand still, you have been round us several times, and now you are standing still again; it is as though you had some evil intention!"

"Master, I am not——"

"Go, whatever you are or are not, else you will see I will get rid of you."

Sandu could hardly stand, a sort of mist darkened his eyes, and his heart was bursting. He would have cried, but he was ashamed for a grown man to be walking across the market-place with tears in his eyes. He suffered and would gladly have told how deeply the words he had listened to had hurt him, but he had no one to whom he could open his heart.

He returned to the innkeeper with whom he was lodging. Tired and spent he threw himself on the bench.

"What is it?" asked the innkeeper.

Sandu looked vaguely at him, then, as if afraid to hear the sound of his own voice, he said:

"Nothing."

The innkeeper felt sorry for him.

"Have you found a situation?"

"I did not ask for one."

"Then how can you hope to get one?"

Sandu remained silent. The innkeeper looked strangely at him, shrugged his shoulders, shook his head, and went to attend to his duties.

With his elbows on the table, and his head resting in his hands, Sandu gazed in front of him, and who knows where his thoughts would have led him if the innkeeper had not said to him:

"Listen, Dinu Talpoane sent to ask whether there was any workman in need of work. Go with

the apprentice and he may perhaps engage you. He is a respectable man and does a big trade."

Without a word Sandu got up. It seemed to him he must be dreaming. But when he saw the apprentice with an apron stained yellow and with big boots covered with stale sap, his eyes shone, and he could have kissed the innkeeper's hands for very joy.

Outside he began to talk to the apprentice, who told him that the master was a splendid man, but his wife was harsh and heaven defend you from her tongue; that the workshop was large and the work considerable, especially in the autumn; and that the master sometimes engaged workmen by the day in order to get a set of hides ready more quickly; and many other things he told him. But Sandu was no longer listening.

When the apprentice saw that he asked no further questions, he hesitated to say more, and they walked along together in silence.

Sandu knew where he had to go, but he did not know what to say, or what terms to make—by the year, the month, the week; he could not think what would be best to do. What he knew of the workshop of the master-tanner with whom he had learnt his trade, and all he had heard from the hands working there with him, seemed to be buzzing in his brain until he grew so bewildered that he could not have told how many days there are in a week, or how much money he would earn if he worked for a whole month.

"Here we are," said the apprentice, stopping in front of a doorway with gates.

Sandu felt a cold shiver go through him. For a second he stood still. Three years as apprentice and four years as workman he had worked for one master only, and he would have remained there all his life if he had not been taken to be a soldier, and if the master had not died he would have gone back to him the day he left the army. He felt quite nervous, and if the apprentice had not opened the gate he would not have gone in.

"They are eating," said the apprentice, seeing the big yard was empty, and he crossed to the bottom of it where a small house stood built against the old workshop.

They were close to the window when they heard people talking in the house, and the clatter of knives.

"Look here," said Sandu, "you go on and say I have come but that I am waiting till they have finished dinner."

The apprentice went in and told the master that a workman was outside, but would not come in till the master had got up from the table.

"Tell him to come into the house."

But his wife interrupted him with :

"Leave him out there. Who knows what sort of a creature he is if he does not venture to show his face inside ! Let me have my dinner in peace."

The husband, a well-built man, with a round,

red face and kind blue eyes, felt if he said any more his wife would snap his head off, so he let the apprentice go.

The apprentice, who knew that one word from the mistress was worth a hundred orders from the master, withdrew to the hearth in the outer room, and waited till he should be called to dinner.

"But what's the matter, Ghitza, you are not eating?" he heard his mistress saying. "Or are you waiting to be invited? Dear, dear, perhaps I ought to beg the gentleman to come to table!"

The apprentice, accustomed to the mistress's ways, took a chair. But he had not swallowed three mouthfuls before the mistress bade him call in "that ne'er-do-well out there."

Sandu shyly wished them good day, but of all those sitting round the table he only saw the master, and by his side the mistress, whose eyes seemed to scorch him and make him lose his presence of mind.

"What is your name?" the master asked him.

"I am called Sandu Boldurean."

And in a low voice he told where he was born, with whom he had learnt the trade, and how long he had worked, but during the questioning he scarcely raised his eyelids. He grew confused at once when the mistress screamed at him:

"But you'll ruin your hat turning it round like that in your hands. Put it down somewhere and speak up so that a man can understand what you are saying."

Sandu felt the blood go to his head, and hardly knowing what he was doing he hung his hat on a bolt on the door.

"And you worked only with one master?"

"Only one. See, here is my work-book," and with some haste he drew out the handkerchief, unknotted it, and held out his "work-book" to the master.

"Let me see too," said the mistress, snatching the book from her husband's hand. "After all, it's no wonder this idiot stayed in the same place; and who knows what kind of a master it was?" she whispered to her husband.

He would have replied that it was a very good thing for a workman to have stayed so long with one master, for most tanners worked in the same way, and only here and there were the hides dressed differently; but he was ashamed to say so before the workman, and so he busied himself by looking through the book.

Sandu broke into a sweat; when he held out the book he felt his soul was full of joy at having got so far, but little by little, especially when the mistress took the book and whispered to her husband, his heart seemed turned to ice.

What would he say to him? Supposing he found something bad? Supposing he did not give him work? These were the questions which passed through his mind and which he could not answer, although he knew his book only spoke well of him,

and that the master required a workman because it was autumn when business is in full swing.

A great burden seemed lifted from him at the master's words :

"Good, I will engage you. How much did you get from your late master ?"

"I worked for him for four years and had a salary."

"What a lot of talk ! We will give you one and a half florins per week without washing, and you can stay, though probably in the army you have forgotten all you knew about work," the mistress broke into the conversation, as she rose from the table.

It was the signal for the two workmen and the apprentice to return to their work.

Sandu stood transfixed. Only the master and a child of six or seven years of age remained in the house, as the girl and the mistress went into the passage to see to the dinner things.

"Well, do you agree ? Will you stay or not ?" scolded the mistress as she appeared in the doorway.

"I will stay," replied Sandu, scarcely knowing what he said.

The master looked at her, and turned to Sandu.

"Have you had your dinner ?"

"Did he come for you to feed him," his wife interrupted him.

"Woman, you—— "

The mistress threw him a look full of meaning, and disappeared into the yard.

"You can start work to-morrow."

Sandu turned and went out after the master; they walked side by side. When they reached the yard gate they stopped. The master would have liked to say something about the pay. One and a half florins a week seemed so very little to him, but Sandu was simple and glad to get work, and he did not ask for much.

"Master, I will go now. Good luck to you!"

"Good luck to you!" replied the master, and he seemed as though he would like to call him back and say another word to him.

In rather over a month Sandu had had time to get back into his old ways, and to work hopefully at his trade, but during this time he had, little by little, come to see that in his master's house the cock by no means ruled the roost. Sharp-tongued and ill-tempered, Mistress Veta was often dissatisfied with the work. Now it was because the skins had not come out of the vat yellow enough, and had not enough creases; now it was because a range of skins needed mending as the workmen had not been sufficiently careful; and so on and so on, always hard words for the workmen who worked eagerly and with all their might that the skins might be well tanned, and the mistress have no chance to grumble.

At first Sandu found these abusive words hard

to bear, and all day long the thought worried him that the mistress only spoke so to him, and that it was with him only that she was dissatisfied. At one time even he was seized with the desire to go away so that he might hear her no longer, and the other men might not be worried on his account, for he said to himself that only since he entered the workshop had the work gone so badly, and the mistress's tongue chided so unceasingly.

But, all unperceived by himself, he grew somewhat accustomed to the ways of the house, and when a workman told him that the mistress had always been just the same, and that no matter how well the hides were dressed she always found some fault, he took heart and dismissed the idea of quitting the workshop of Talpoane, the master-tanner.

He was up almost before daylight, and never let his work out of his hand till it was dinner-time. He washed his hands clean, and took his usual place at his employers' table—for from olden times it had been the custom for the masters not to keep aloof from the workmen or to dine apart.

Silent at his work, he was, also, silent at meals. Only when he was spoken to did Sandu reply, gently and with dignity. The other men talked and laughed, and when they realized that it pleased the mistress to make fun of Sandu they began to crack every kind of joke at his expense.

At first Sandu opened his eyes wide. He

looked at them and could not understand them, but when he took it in he, too, laughed with them, a laugh full of kindness and friendliness. He lived on good terms with the workmen ; only one of them, Iotza, embittered the days. He only had to say : "You have made the solution too weak," for Sandu, although he knew it was not true, to be unhappy all the week, and often his heart was full of fear that the skins would not come out yellow enough or creased enough to please the mistress.

But he felt comforted when he noticed that, when he came into the workshop, Master Dinu asked only him how many hides were being worked, and when they would be ready, for at such and such a fair he would need so many, because a customer was trying to get in touch with him.

"They'll be ready when they are wanted ; don't worry," Sandu would reply.

And away Master Dinu would go, quite content, and quite sure that the hides would be ready when they were wanted for the fair, or had to be despatched to some customer.

He saw that everything went very well since Sandu entered the workshop. The skins were kept in the pits just long enough for the hair to come off easily and not burn in the lime ; the solution was boiled enough, not too hot and not too strong ; the poles were in their places ; the stretching-pegs were in a neat pile, and the workshop was cleaner than it had ever been before.

And Master Dinu knew the value of a good workman in a place where there were many workers, and where work was plentiful.

"There is only one thing he lacks," he said to himself, "he would be a man in a thousand, but he is too diffident."

But, even in spite of his diffidence, he thought so highly of him that had he asked for four florins a week he would gladly have given it sooner than let him go away.

So he said to himself, but Sandu did not dream of asking for much more than he had. All his life he had worked for the same wage.

It is true that had he done as the others did, and drawn out money every Sunday, he might, perhaps, have felt it was hard to see Master Dinu paying out a great deal more to the others than to him, but he did not ask for his money. On one occasion only did he draw two florins from his pay, and that was because, on a certain Tuesday, his mother had sent greetings to him and had asked him if possible to send her a little help.

Sandu ran off at once to the market-place to find Master Dinu to ask for all the money he was entitled to for his work, that he might send it to his mother. Master Dinu, not knowing what he wanted it for, nor how much he needed, asked whether two florins would be enough.

"Yes," he said, and with the coins in his hand he went to the man from his village. He

wrapped up the money and begged him to lose no time in giving it to his mother and in telling her how much he longed for her, and that, perhaps, she might come to him, for he was working for a good master, and up to now he had not been idle for a single day.

A fortnight passed and he received no tidings of his mother. But on Tuesday, the day of the weekly fair, while he was spreading out the skins, the man came to tell him he had given the money and had brought a letter written by "Peter the Chinaman."

Sandu took the letter and would have liked to open it, but he caught the mistress's eye and involuntarily thrust it into his breast.

"Look at him," she cried, "we are longing to finish the work quickly, and he thinks only of reading lines from his sweetheart."

"I have no sweetheart," repiled Sandu gently.

"Who writes to you then?"

"My mother."

"Your mother? She can't know how to use a pen. Did you ever hear such a lie——"

"I do not lie."

"Not lie? Hold your tongue! As if your mother knows how to write——" And she looked rather sulkily at Sandu, who moved on to the other pile of stretching-pegs.

At this moment one of the workmen told her that the letter really was from his mother, but that it was written by a Chinaman in the village.

"Then why didn't he tell me?" she cried. "Am I supposed to know everything?" Sandu turned round. "But can you read?"

"Yes, mistress, I can."

"It's a good thing you can."

The mistress went away and the men were busy with their work till dinner-time.

Sandu lingered over his letter. When he went indoors the mistress could not resist having one or two hits at him. But Sandu scarcely understood her; his mother thanked him with all her heart, and he was so full of joy that even had the mistress struck him he would have felt nothing of it. He ate of the food, but he could not have told if he were satisfied or hungry when he got up from the table, and he worked like a nigger till the evening.

In bed, with his hands beneath his head, many thoughts crossed his mind. Three years had passed since last he saw his mother. He had often longed for her when he was in the army, but only from time to time had he received news of her. He had left her old and poor.

"And longing for me will have aged her a great deal more," he said to himself, and his heart was heavy when he thought he could not go to see her. "How good it would be if I could go and see her at Christmas! In the meantime I must send more money to give her pleasure and console her."

And he fancied how she would cry with joy when she got the money, and how she would pray

God to lengthen his life and give him success and happiness.

And he seemed to feel himself close to her, and he seemed to hear the whisper of sweet comforting words.

Wrapped in such thoughts as these he fell asleep.

The next day God sent glorious weather, and Sandu beat the skins carefully and often that they might dry quickly.

But no matter what trouble he and the other men took, the skins would not dry, and Master Dinu could not begin the cutting out till next day; the cutting out and trimming goes quickly when one has everything close at hand, and some one to help one, and Master Dinu began to cut out and to trim. But the damping, oiling, thickening and sewing of the sandals and straps was difficult and tedious.

There being great need of haste, Master Dinu told his wife to call Ana, their daughter, that she might help to damp the sandals.

The mistress, who was holding the skins to make it easier for Dinu to cut out the straps, and trim them after cutting out, put her hands on her hips and looked at her husband.

"What, my Ana damp the sandals?"

At his wife's words Master Dinu stayed the knife in the middle of the skin.

"She is not a smart lady, is she, and you are

not going to marry her to some grandee? There is no disgrace to her in coming to give a little help."

His wife lost her temper. Her daughter damp sandals! Her daughter associate with the men! Her daughter, who had gone to school to the nuns for so many years! Her daughter, who knew how to sew so beautifully! Her daughter, who was friends with the niece of one important person, and the inseparable companion of the daughters of another! Her daughter to handle the sandals and make her fingers smell of bark!

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," she said, hoarse with anger, "even if you do not know how to behave properly, you need not insult your daughter."

"Insult?" questioned Master Dinu.

But his wife rushed from the room.

He looked long after her, then glanced at the workmen, took up the knife with a nervous movement, and began quickly to cut out the sandals.

The workmen, who had heard the words exchanged, and seen the abrupt departure of the mistress, kept complete silence and busied themselves with their work.

Master Dinu finished cutting the skins.

"You might hurry yourselves a little when you know the work ought to be ready," he said to the men, and departed, hanging his head.

"Very unhappy is Master Dinu," said Iotza, looking after him.

"Why?" one of them asked him.

"Why? Because those are the sharpest words I have ever heard coming from his mouth."

Dinner was unusually quiet, only the little boy whined and asked for first one thing and then another. His mother gave him one or two raps over the knuckles to make him sit still and be silent, but the child began to cry, and she angrily sent him into the next room.

Master Dinu said never a word and his daughter, Ana, looked round her in a frightened manner, and would like to have asked what had happened to-day to make them all so downcast.

Sandu had seen her many times, but he had never seen her well. He knew she was the master's daughter. He greeted her when she came to the table, but speak to her or look her really in the face, that, up till to-day, he had never done.

But when he saw her looking sadly, now at her father, now at her mother, and then at the others seated round the table, he wanted to say something to her to cheer her and make her laugh. But he had nothing to tell her, he could not find a word, and when their eyes met he felt as though he were being swept away by a storm, and carried he knew not whither.

Ana was so beautiful and so graceful. With her white hands and her fair face one would never have believed her to be the daughter of an artisan. Her big blue eyes, so full of kindness, were shaded

by black eyelashes, and when she laughed one's heart glowed in the joyous sound, and one wished one could often hear her laughing.

Iotza—he had been workman with Dinu for a long time—when the mistress was out of the house, had more than once asked her to mend something for him, and not infrequently she had brought him drink from the cellar when the frost was sharp and he had complained that he could not stand the cold. And with all his prudence Iotza had let drop a word in the workshop in praise of Ana's kindness.

And so it came about that they all waited for the mistress to go out that they might speak to Ana and ask her one thing or another.

Only Sandu had never been to her. And that was why he especially wanted now to divert her thoughts and make her smile.

Her eyes troubled him, and he felt happier when he found himself back in the workshop.

One day, according to the allotment of the work, it was his duty to turn the skins in the vats full of birch bark solution. He was alone in the workshop, he could work in peace, but he often let the stick fall from his hand, for, unlike other days, that day the fumes made him perspire, and he did not notice whether the skins were thoroughly turned. There was one vat more to turn when the door opened gently.

"Good luck, Sandu."

Sandu raised his head as though he were in a

dream, wiped away the sweat, and looked at Ana as one looks at a person one does not the least expect to see. He wanted to say something to her, but a lump rose in his throat. Ana came nearer to him.

"Sandu, I came to tell you to put the sandals in the box after you have turned the skins."

"Good," replied Sandu.

"Don't forget what Father said," and away she went.

Outside she met Iotza, and passed him in such a hurry that she did not hear his greeting.

"Well, Sandu, what did Ana want in the workshop?" he asked as he threw his apron behind a vat.

"Nothing," replied Sandu, who was disappointed at not talking longer with Ana.

"Nothing? Well, well! Listen, have you turned the skins?"

"I have."

"Have you filled the boiler with water?"

"Yes, I have."

"How much have you put? You have not filled it! Bring two more bucketfuls."

"How can you pour two more bucketfuls in when it does not hold more than one?"

"It does not hold more? I tell you plainly you have been too lazy to bring more, and who knows how you have turned the skins."

Sandu grew red.

"Iotza, I learnt my work from the master and not from the workman."

"And what next?"

"The next is, that I don't need your advice."

"We shall see," cried Iotza, and went off.

Three days later the mistress came to the workshop; she walked about here and there, and after a while she looked at the vats and took out a skin.

"Who turned this vat?"

"I did," replied Sandu.

"I thought as much! Now you—just come and look at your work! That's how you turned it; that's what the solution is like; that's the kind of work you get paid for!"

Sandu went up to the vat feeling as though he had been struck on the head. The solution was yellow, the skins were yellow and creased as usual, and he could not understand what fault the mistress had to find.

"I told him so," said Iotza, interfering in the conversation; and as he opened the door to take out a bundle of bark, he added: "But he knows everything, and doesn't need advice from anyone."

"Of course," scolded the mistress, "you did not have time to turn the skins; you stood talking, and took no heed of your work. What was Ana looking for here the day before yesterday?"

"Ana—Ana came to tell me to put away the sandals in the box."

"And you could not do that much without being told? You are the kind of man one must

tell everything to, otherwise there would not be much use in your work!"

For some time Sandu stayed alone in the workshop; he felt as though he could not move. His mistress's words rang continually in his ears, and he felt numbed by their harshness.

The apprentice had come to call him to dinner, but he had not gone. It seemed to him they had all heard what the mistress said, and would have stared at him.

Iotza and the other man returned from dinner and found him in the workshop, his hand resting on the vat.

"Why, when you had turned the skins, didn't you come to dinner, or have you been talking to Ana?" sneered Iotza.

Sandu heard his voice, but he did not take in what he said. He looked at him with great sad eyes, and not knowing what to do went outside.

Sandu rose at daybreak the following day, but he could not have told if he had slept, or whether his thoughts had tormented him all night. He left the workshop without having done anything, he went to the pits, and took the skins out with the pincers to try whether they were ready to dress, then he returned to the workshop and was still quite unsettled.

He went to dinner with the other men; he followed them; had anyone asked him whither he was going he could not have told them. They

were alone, and all quite silent, and just this silence was painful to Sandu. He would have liked to hear conversation, a great deal of talking. They were about to rise from the table when the mistress arrived. Everything seemed to turn black before Sandu's eyes.

After exchanging a few words, Iotza said :

"Mistress, you better let me turn the skins in those two vats—— "

"Yes, you turn them, just like Sandu did."

The blood rushed to his head as Sandu dropped his knife and spilt a piece of lard upon the table.

"Do you think I shall pity you because you don't eat ? You have not turned them well, and that's all. I didn't begin to keep a workshop to-day or yesterday."

"Mistress—— "

"Oh, it's always mistress, mistress ! Do your work properly, and don't let your thoughts go wandering far afield, then no one need find fault with you."

The workmen rose. Sandu got up too ; his feet could hardly carry him, and his head was heavy.

. . . . .

For two whole days Sandu did not know whether he was himself or some one else. He could not take his food, sleep only came to him at rare intervals. And during this time he often thought of going to Master Dinu and giving him

notice. Several times he had left the workshop determined to tell him, but once Iotza had called him to come and help with something, and then he had thought it over and had left it to a more suitable time when he should find Dinu alone, for in front of the mistress he could have said nothing to him.

And who knows whether he would have said anything, if Master Dinu had not come through the workshop. He asked him how the skins were getting on, and then, as he never cared to prolong a conversation, he prepared to go, after telling him that one lot of work must be pressed forward, and the other done in such and such a way.

Sandu had followed him but the words died upon his lips.

"What is it, Sandu? Do you want to tell me something?"

"Well, Master Dinu, without any offence to you, I want to give up the work."

Master Dinu looked long at him. He was prepared for anything except this, and just now when the fairs were in full swing.

"You want to give me notice? But why?"

"Because the mistress is always abusing me, and she is not satisfied with the way I work, and Iotza makes fun of me, and I can bear it no longer: it is too hard. I work with all my might, and I want to do good work, and I don't want you to keep me just out of charity as people say you do."

"Come, don't do that; you know the mistress, that is her way. As for Iotza—listen, I'll stop his mouth. And, then, where would you find another place? Take my advice and let me talk to the mistress."

Master Dinu went away, and Sandu returned to the workshop. Before he had spoken with Master Dinu he had not seemed to realize whether there was work to finish, and now he did not know whether he had finished it or not.

Master Dinu went into the house. He told his wife that Sandu had wished to leave, and bade her leave him in peace from now on, seeing that he was an industrious workman and an honest man.

"Thank you," replied his wife; "let me tell you that I take as much interest in the workshop as you do, and if I am not to be allowed to speak to the workmen, or give them orders about the work——"

"I do not say you are not to give them orders, but you are not to make fun of them. After all, they are human beings."

"So I am in the wrong! If I tell them how they are to do something I am making fun of the men; impertinent man, to accuse me of joking. And why didn't you send him away?"

"Send him away? Why? Just now when we are greatly in need of men? I rack my brains to try and get another hand for the work, and don't

know where to find one, while you are longing to get rid of Sandu, and in the long run, for no reason. You must not be like this."

They were still talking when Nitza Burencea came to ask if he was going to the fair at Devi.

That evening, after supper, the mistress stopped Sandu as she wanted to send him somewhere.

"Sandu, why did you want to leave your work? Are you not satisfied with our food?"

"Quite satisfied."

"Or don't we give you enough whisky in the evening?"

"I don't drink whisky."

"Don't drink it? But, you silly man, why didn't you tell me? And those other two said nothing about it—you don't think it rains whisky with us, do you? They have drawn your share all these days. But I'll wipe their mouths for them. Why did you not tell me long ago?"

"You never asked me."

"Well, go where I tell you; and, listen, if I send you it is because I have not got so much confidence in the others; do just what I have told you."

"I will do so, mistress," replied Sandu, with a much lighter heart.

When he reached the street he told himself the mistress was not so bad after all.

An hour later, when he returned, only Ana was downstairs.

After saying good evening, seeing that Ana was by herself, he prepared to go out again.

Ana, who saw he was about to open the door, asked him :

"What do you want, Sandu ? Whom are you looking for ?"

"For the mistress."

"Then wait for her, she will soon come. Sit down."

Sandu seated himself on the edge of a chair.

Ana was sewing ; he watched her hands with their rapid movements, and his eyes were absorbed in looking at something more beautiful than he had ever seen before. Ana felt she was being watched. This idea seemed to hurry her, and she grasped her needle and began to sew quickly. The more intently he watched her, the more embarrassed did Ana become, and a rosy flush mantled her cheeks. A sort of fever came over her, and in her innermost soul she was picturing Sandu to herself, how he was sitting on the chair with his black eyes fixed upon her, and his eyes were so beautiful and so eloquent, and Sandu was good-looking. She could bear it no longer, his look seemed to burn her.

"Sandu, why do you look at me like that ?"

"I—I—was not looking."

A long silence followed. Their souls seemed to draw near each other in the silent room ; they spoke no word, but it was as though they told each other many things and understood each other very

well. He was very conscious of her, so near to him, her light breath was almost inaudible, but it made his heart beat fast; she was very conscious of him, and something intangible but sweet seemed to invade their hearts.

She felt as though she could not sew, and he found it hard to look at her. He was afraid of offending her and he was shy, and he felt he should be ashamed for her to find his glance resting upon her hands.

He kept his head down. But Ana would have liked to look at him, she would have liked to bask in the light of his eyes, for she felt happy enveloped in their warm glow.

Sandu did not lift his head. She dropped her ball of thread. Roused by the noise, Sandu jumped as though he had been burnt. He searched under the table and saw it.

She forgot to thank him, and he could not say a word, but their eyes met and they both blushed.

The time passed on.

"The mistress does not come," said Sandu a little later, "and I wanted to tell her that I had to stay some time where she sent me."

"She will soon come," replied Ana. "Sandu, you told Mother that I had been in the work-shop?" she suddenly questioned, looking straight at him.

"I did not tell her."

"Then who can have told her?"

"It was not I, and I do not know who it was."

"How Mother scolded me! And she said I had stayed a long while talking to you. Was I a long time?"

"Certainly not; you just came to tell me to put the sandals in the boxes, and then you went away."

"Why doesn't Mother like my talking to you when Father says you are so good?"

He said nothing; she stopped; and a few moments later the mistress came in.

"It is a good thing you are back. I was waiting for you," she said hurriedly. "I nearly sent some one after you; you are very slow. Now, come and tell me what you have done."

In the ante-room he told her what he had arranged with her aunt, and then went off to bed.

The next day was Sunday. The men had little work to do, and by ten o'clock they were free. As usual on feast days there was wine on the table, and Master Dinu, having bought some thirty skins much more easily than he had expected to, was more cheerful than usual.

Sandu was more forthcoming than was his wont, and had washed and brushed himself extra well to-day. Ana, too, was smart, smart as always, but she had no time to sit as she had constantly to jump up to help her mother. Every now and then she threw a glance at Sandu, and a strange feeling of joy

possessed her that he could see her, that he looked at her.

Only the mistress was as usual, and when the child complained constantly that his head ached she wanted the meal to finish quickly. She laid a wet handkerchief on his forehead and put him to bed. The child became quieter, and Master Dinu, after drinking the wine that was left over, rose from the table—a signal that the meal was finished. Then, according to his usual habit, he took up his hat, inquired if anyone wanted any money, gave Iotza what he asked, and went off into the town.

"Sandu," said the mistress, when the workmen had gone, "if you are not going anywhere, come back in an hour when we have finished with the dinner things and sit with Gheorghitza, for to-day is Sunday and perhaps visitors will come to the house."

Ana looked at him; Sandu hardly understood the mistress's words, and could not answer her.

"Speak, are you coming or not?"

"I will come." And he went out as though he had been pushed.

At three o'clock came the mistress's mother, a woman of about sixty years of age, rosy in the face and well made. She was wearing a dark coloured skirt, and on her head a kerchief of black silk which reached nearly to her knees, and in her hand, like all old women, she carried a yellow handkerchief.

She rarely came to see her daughter, partly because she knew her time for going out in society

was past, but especially because Mistress Veta was not glad to see her on feast days ; she would not have come to-day, but she had not been for a long time and she was desirous of seeing her grandchildren.

Inside the front room she rejoiced over the beauty and good manners of her grand-daughter, who, with her mother, was removing the last speck of dust, or putting back in its right place anything that had been left about.

Ana sat down by her grandmother, and her grandmother stroked her head and looked tenderly into her face. She never grew tired of saying : "Such grandchildren, such dear grandchildren." But just when she was feeling happy the door opened.

"Ah, Mr. and Mrs. Naraschievici ! " said Mistress Veta, jumping up to receive them as though some royal party had arrived.

"Pray sit down."

Mr. and Mrs. Naraschievici accepted the invitation, while their daughter, a pale, plain girl of over twenty years of age, did not forget to kiss the mistress's hand.

"I kiss your hand, aunt," said Ana, too, while Mrs. Naraschievici in her turn embraced her on the forehead, and could not help expressing her wonder at how tall Ana had grown and how pretty she was.

Ana blushed and joined Miss Naraschievici, while the mistress's eyes shone with pleasure.

"You must not tell her so; you must not turn her head," she said, just for something to say, while her mother was asking herself the question as to why on earth her grand-daughter had said that "Aunt."

It is true that neither Ana nor Mistress Veta was related to the Naraschievici family; however, Mr. Naraschievici said it was "aristocratic," and all he said was right in Mistress Veta's eyes.

"Is Master Dinu at home?"

"No. You know what he is—he cannot bear to stay at home."

As she said this, Mistress Veta approached her mother, who looked as if she could have taken the whole Naraschievici family and put them outside the door, so angry was she because they had spoilt the happy hour she had hoped to pass with her grand-daughter.

"Mother," she whispered in her ear, "it would be kind if you would go downstairs to Gheorghitza, who ought to be up now."

The old lady was at the door before she had finished speaking: with her hand on the latch she looked furiously at her daughter and at Mr. and Mrs. Naraschievici, choked back some words and went out.

She was going away, saying to herself that she would never again set foot inside the house, when she remembered Gheorghitza. When the old lady went in Sandu was telling him tales.

"Here is kind Granny, here is kind Granny," cried Gheorghitza gaily.

He got up quickly, put his arms round her neck and kissed her over and over again.

The old woman forgot her distress as she held Gheorghitza in her arms. He began to untie the handkerchief and feel in the pocket of her gown.

"Look what Granny has brought for Gheorghitza," she said.

It was her habit to bring some toy for him.

Now that he had a plaything, Gheorghitza was no longer ill. His kind Granny made him forget it. The old lady watched him for some time, and then she looked at Sandu.

"How is the work getting on!"

"Well."

"And business is profitable?"

"Profitable."

As Sandu said this Mistress Veta came into the ante-room, took a plateful of cakes out of a cupboard and went quickly away again.

During the noise she made the old lady looked intently towards the window.

"She takes them upstairs, but she did not invite me," and her eyes filled with tears. "That is how she esteems me," said the old lady, steeped in bitterness. "It's a sad world. I have reached an old age when my own daughter is ashamed of me. She sends me out of the house as if I were a nobody. May God not punish her, for she has children.

But it hurts me to see her pay no attention to me just because of some bankrupts, some wretches who have fled from Temishoara to avoid their creditors. But I did not come to get something out of her. I did not come like those bankrupts to get something to eat. Thank God I have all I need at home, but that she should belittle me in such a way as to make me ridiculous in their eyes—Lord, Lord, did I rear her for this? Is it for this I watched over her?"

"Sandu," said the old lady, sighing heavily, "give her my thanks, tell her how I appreciate the honour she has done me, and that all my life I shall never forget that she received me as she should receive her mother. But listen to me; tell her, too, she may wait a long time before I cross her threshold again, and she need not send to me when she wants anything. Let her go to the gentleman, to the bankrupt Naraschievici."

And away went Mistress Veta's mother, so angry that she could not see where she was walking, while Sandu sat with drooping head.

In about half an hour Ana came. She was disappointed to hear her grandmother had gone, and wanted to know why.

Sandu did not like to tell her, and because his heart would not let him lie he said to her in a low voice:

"Well, she went because she could not stay."

Ana sat on the edge of the bed, and sympathizing

with her brother, she asked him whether his head ached.

Gheorghitza had no time to answer; he shook his head and went on playing.

"Sandu, can you stay with him? You see, I must go up again. Gheorghitza dear, be good and play nicely."

Then she kissed him and went slowly away as though she were loth to go.

And with her went Sandu's heart and the joy which filled his soul when he saw her standing by her brother and kissing him so tenderly.

Mistress Veta was beside herself with pleasure that evening. She did not even ask when or why her mother had gone so suddenly. She told Sandu that he was not to dare to tell her what the old lady had said, but to go and get wood to make a fire to warm the supper. And once again she went over in her mind all that Mr. and Mrs. Naraschievici had said. She felt very flattered, and said she did not remember when she had spent such a pleasant day.

. . . . .

There was a heavy frost and the Timish was frozen. The tanners were obliged to have openings made in the ice to enable the rinsing of the skins to take place.

Sandu, shod in big working boots, made his way through the thick mist and came down to the Timish to rinse a set of skins. Behind him came the

apprentice with a barrow containing the block of wood with its stand, the rinser and two hatchets for breaking the ice. They made the opening in the ice and Sandu remained alone. He fixed one end of the block on to a stake and arranged the stand firmly under the other, opened out two skins, placed them one over the other, on the block, and began to work.

Sandu was hardened and accustomed to the cold, but however fast he worked his breath froze and his hands grew stiff. Seldom at first, but then more and more frequently did he stamp his feet. He put the rinser on the block, breathed into the palms of his hands, and swinging his arms he beat under his left arm with his right hand, and then under the right arm with his left hand, to make his blood circulate, the while his eyes watered with the cold.

Round him was a frosty calm ; the gurgling of the water as he turned the skins made him realize all the more the severity of the winter. He worked away at his task, but slowly, and with little result. It was getting towards noon, and he had rinsed five skins when he heard a crunching of the snow on the bank, and raised his head.

The rinser dropped from his hand. On the bank was Ana with a jug in her hand, wishing him "Good luck."

Sandu did not know how to answer her.

"Come, see what I have brought you, a drop of

warm wine, for Mother is out, and you must be cold."

Sandu came up the bank ; he could hardly hold the jug.

"Thank you," he said with his mouth, but his heart spoke from his eyes.

Ana looked down.

"Drink quickly," she said, so softly she could scarcely be heard, "for I must not stay long."

Sandu drank the wine.

"Ana, Miss Ana—— "

Ana drew back her hand, and looking at him in a way I cannot describe, she said :

"Are you warmer now ? "

Sandu's eyes were too eloquent, the peaceful isolation was too tempting, the stillness of the atmosphere was too intense, their hearts were too attuned for them not to understand each other.

She went up to him with an eager movement, and he put his arm about her waist and clasped her to his heart.

They neither of them said a word, but to them both it seemed that no words were needed.

"Sandu, I must go, I must really go, for Mother might come," and gently she disengaged herself from his arms, took a few slow steps, turned round, and then fled like a little kid towards the house.

While Sandu was watching her, Costa came along ; he, too, was a master-tanner.

"Ha, ha ! Talpoane's hands live well. What

a moment for me to arrive," murmured Costa in his beard, smiling as he thought of the story he would be able to tell. "Sandu," he shouted, "I was going to see you, but as you are at the rinsing I have come down to ask you whether the hides which I have been waiting for these three days have come from Pesta."

"No, they have not come."

"Not? Why the devil haven't they sent them? Have you much work?"

"A great deal."

"How many hides?"

Sandu looked at him.

"We have a lot."

"A lot. Yes, I know you have a lot, but how many?"

"I have not counted them."

"Have you got business at Hunedoar fair?"

"I believe so; the drying is difficult, though."

"You have got some heavy skins, haven't you?"

"Some heavy, some light; you know how it is with the work."

Costa bit his lips and would like to have given Sandu a cuff or two, so angry was he that he would not tell him what he was longing to know.

"But, it's cold!"

"It's cold."

"Come, you ought not to feel it much when Talpoane's daughter brings you drink."

The blood rushed to Sandu's face, and he did

not know why he did not strike Costa to the ground as he smiled at him.

"But what of it, haven't we all done the same kind of thing? Only look out that nobody sees you and nobody hears you. That's all right, I won't keep you from your work!"

Sandu could not see, everything was black before his eyes, he was hot all over and a fire seemed to burn within him. He gnashed his teeth and stretched the skin as though he would tear it, and rinsed as though he had some rival to surpass.

At midday the apprentice came to call him to dinner. On the way he remembered what had happened and would have liked to turn back. In the ante-room he saw Ana, and his heart beat as though it were on fire. Ana, too, was radiant, her eyes laughed with joy, and the dimples in her cheeks were more tantalizing than ever. Sandu's heart was full of delight; he forgot what Costa had said; he was only conscious of Ana's voice.

After dinner the cold was not quite so cruel, the calm was not so intense, and he did not feel alone; there seemed to be plenty of life around him, but whenever he turned his head he could only see Ana And longings awoke in his heart, and many pleasant thoughts passed through his mind, and they all gathered round Ana's form. His thoughts carried him far, and he pictured himself with a workshop and a house of his own, and Ana beside him making life sweet. They were so tempting and so full of

charm that Sandu smiled to himself as he strung together tender, caressing words to say to Ana, for he felt she belonged to him, and no one could disturb the peace of these happy days.

Night closed sadly in and Sandu had long ago finished his work, but he did not want to move. He was loath to leave the pleasant, quiet spot where he had pictured to himself the path in life that was awaiting him. He gave a sigh of regret as he stepped along the bank and walked towards the house of Mistress Veta.

. . . . .

The nearer it drew to the Christmas festival the busier became the fairs, and the tanners raised the price of their goods because the weather was moist, and the peasants were obliged to buy sandals whether they wanted to or not.

Christmas Eve fell on a Tuesday, and, accordingly, the weekly fair had never been better.

Although Mistress Veta had such a lot to do that she had hardly time to turn round, she remained at the booth till ten o'clock, when she returned home.

The little white, crown-shaped rolls were baked and divided up, some for the house, some for the poor, and some for the guests who would expect hospitality the day after Christmas Day. When everything was finished and put ready, and Master Dinu arrived, they all went into the front room. There they lit a fire that must not be allowed to die

out, that Christ, who was born on this night, might not feel the cold, and there they quietly waited till their house was visited by carol-singers and lads carrying "Stars" or "Magi." To make the joy next day more complete, they lit the Christmas Tree, and out of a cupboard Master Dinu took a little riding-horse for Gheorghitza, and for Ana a work-frame and other things suitable for a big girl. The parents were happy at the gratitude written on their children's faces.

Gradually the world seemed to wake up, the quiet in the town was dispelled. As the stars rose in the sky, there appeared in every street, girls carrying "Christmas Trees," boys with "Stars" or "Magi" or "the Manger," and young men with "carols," and amidst this busy movement, amidst this pleasant noise, amidst slow, sad songs or beautiful carols, the whole town seemed enveloped in an atmosphere of reverence; each one, forgetting the troubles of life, felt himself drawing nearer to the glory of God.

While Master Dinu was listening to the carol-singers from his windows, and taking the symbol of the Magi into his house, Sandu sat alone in the workshop over the way. He had lit an end of candle, and was sitting on a chair in front of the opening in the stove below the boiler.

At intervals a drop of liquid fell from the vats, and the sound of its fall echoed long in the quiet workshop.

The noise from outside broke dully against the

window and took Sandu's thoughts back to other days. And all at once he began to carol to himself:

"And as you journey thither
There comes wafted many a mile,
From where the Holy Infant lies,
The scent of fair flowers,
The glow of bright torches,
The smoke of the incense,
The song of the angels."

He sang softly, and the dead past of the years he had spent since he left the home where he was born seemed to unroll itself before him. And as he saw himself alone, and deprived of every kind of pleasure, a tear crept into his eye, and with his head resting upon his hand, he sat gazing into the fire. All the nine years that he had spent Christmas among strangers, he had envied the joy of others, and never once had he felt in his heart the peace of the season as he used to in the days when he was at home. And who would think of him, or who would give him any happiness at this holy festival?

The workshop door opened hastily, and the appearance of Ana scattered his thoughts to the wind.

"Sandu, I have brought you something for Christmas." Sandu did not hold out his hand for it. "How you look at me, Sandu! Why do you not want what I bring you?"

So saying, Ana came quite close to him, and put what she had brought into his hand.

"Ana," said Sandu, in a stifled voice, "may God look upon you as I look at you."

His voice seemed to come from the depths of his soul, and Ana's look grew troubled. The kindness and sorrow with which he spoke touched her strangely, and resting her head upon his breast she murmured as in a dream :

"Sandu, dear Sandu."

But she had to go, for she had stolen from the house when some boys, carrying Magi, had arrived, and her mother would be looking for her.

Sandu remained behind to tell himself that never had God given him a happier Christmas.

The day after Christmas, in the afternoon, his various god-children came to Master Dinu's house : hospitality demands hospitality. They brought with them rolls and other things. Mistress Veta spread food upon the table, and whoever came took in exchange a roll from the god-parents.

By the evening, Lena, Tziru's widow, alone remained.

Master Dinu was in a hurry to get away, and Ana was downstairs with some friends.

The women remained by themselves, enjoying the wine and conversing. And when two women sit gossiping, who escapes unscathed by their tongues ? One person is so and so, another person dresses so absurdly that every one laughs at her, and so the idle talk runs on.

"Doesn't it make you laugh"—Mistress Veta

takes up the word—"when you see Costa's wife as pink as a girl? How can a woman of her age paint herself?"

"Never mind her, my dear, there are others——"

"I don't seem to have heard of them."

Then a little later on:

"I don't know how it is but Costa is an ill-natured man and a regular chatterbox."

"You say truly, it's the talk of the town."

"But he has become a little more careful, he's not as he was a while ago. He has begun to shrug his shoulders only and keep his tongue quiet."

"He pretends to, my dear, but you have not heard him—it's better for me not to tell you, not to make you unhappy, especially on a feast day."

"Of course, you must tell me," Mistress Veta raised her voice and her eyes flashed.

"I would sooner you heard it from other lips."

"Now, Lena, either you tell me, or——"

Lena knew Mistress Veta too well not to tell her that Costa was saying how he had seen Ana going down to the Timish with warm wine for Sandu, and how she had stood in the cold for two hours talking to him, and a great deal more besides.

Red was the wine, but Mistress Veta's face was redder still. She might have had an apoplectic stroke.

"Ah! He said those words?"

Lena did not know how to calm her.

"My dear, really I did not know how much it

would upset you or I should never have told you. Why do you get so angry? Every one knows he is a liar and a mischief-maker without his equal in the empire, and who pays attention to all his tales, and all the world knows how you have brought up Ana. What tanner's daughter can touch her? Your Ana—come, leave it."

"I will not leave it," cried Mistress Veta, somewhat calmer. "I'll show him. To whom did he say these words?"

"I don't know to whom he said them; I heard of it in Trifu's house."

"In Trifu's house! Trifu is his cousin. Don't listen, Lena; do you believe his lies?"

"How could I believe him, my dear, how could I believe him? Neither did Trifu believe him. He said he would blush to invent such lies."

"Lies, Lena, lies. But let him see me! My daughter——"

"Say no more about it, Veta. May God keep Ana well, and you see her happy. Costa—but who's Costa? Everybody laughs when he opens his mouth."

"You heard it in Trifu's house! Who knows in how many places he has spit out his libels, for that man spits, Lena, he spits worse than any cat; but I am not I if I don't pay him out."

Lena agreed with her, and sympathized with her and urged her not to be so angry, for the whole town knew what Ana's behaviour always was, and

people stood still and looked after her when she passed by, sweet and modest as a rosebud.

"Why let yourself be unhappy, my dear?" she said, getting up to go, "when every one's heart swells when they see Ana, as if she were not the pride of us all when we see her going about with gentlemen's daughters. Ana is just herself, and there is no one like her, so why give yourself bad moments because of the tittle-tattle of a man like Costa?"

Mistress Veta accompanied Lena to the door, and came back asking herself what was to be done.

Master Dinu came back just at the right moment.

Without much hesitation his wife told him everything with various additions and improvements.

"Eh! And what of it?" he said. "Don't the people know us and our daughter, and don't they know what Costa's words are worth? Only Costa says it."

Mistress Veta looked furiously at him.

"What! The town is talking about your daughter, and you don't mind?"

"It isn't that I don't mind! Of course I mind, but what would you have me do? Go and kill him? Don't be like this."

"Not be like this? I'd better be like you and not care when they insult my daughter!"

"Come now, what am I to do?"

"What are you to do? Woe betide the house where the man is not a real man! Find out, discover to whom he has said it, collect witnesses, and see he never opens his mouth again."

"I will see about it."

"Don't see about it, find him."

Master Dinu knew that his wife must always have the last word, so he said nothing; he would have been glad not to be at home, but he could not go now. A few minutes later he said:

"Listen, Veta, all right, I will find witnesses, but supposing it's true?"

"True?" screamed his wife, and looked as though she could have thrown herself upon him and struck him. "True? Why doesn't God strangle the word in your throat?" she snarled, and hurriedly left the room.

A few seconds later she returned with Ana.

"Ana, hear your father say that it is true you took warm wine to Sandu."

The haste with which her mother had called her, and her father's expression so overcame her, that she stood with drooping head, and raising a corner of her apron began to cry.

"So this is where we have got to—get out of my sight that I may never see you again."

Mistress Veta sank exhausted on to a chair, while Ana sobbed as if her heart would break.

"Why all this to-do even if she did take wine to the poor man? What is the great harm in that?

She took him wine because he was cold, and because I told her to go," said Master Dinu, going up to Ana. "Don't cry any more," and he stroked her forehead.

Ana continued to sob, and clung more and more tightly to her father. Master Dinu felt as if his heart would break.

"Go and kiss your mother's hand, it's nothing. Veta——"

"No, let her get out of my sight, let her go. Ana has done this to me, my prudent daughter, my good daughter, my much-praised daughter, her mother's joy—she has done this," and Mistress Veta shook her head while everything seemed to turn black before her eyes.

Master Dinu did not know what to do. To put an end to it, he drew Ana gently outside, and tried to quiet her sobs.

A little later he returned to the house. His wife was exhausted and depressed, and sat gazing at the floor.

Suddenly she rose.

"Dinu, you must give Sandu notice to-day, do you hear? If you don't go now and tell him never to show himself here again, you'll never have any peace from me."

"How can I dismiss the man in the middle of the night? You must see we cannot—and then, what harm has he done?"

Mistress Veta could have killed him with a look.

"You will give him notice, do you understand? Or I will turn him out."

"All right, Veta, we will give him notice, but what stories will be told about us outside! How we dismiss workmen on feast days, and turn them out of the house in the dead of night. You must be patient. To-morrow I will give him all the money due to him, and tell him to go in God's name."

"It's your business to deal with him; never let me see him again; if they make any fuss I'll scratch his eyes out. He has got us talked about, no other than he, do you hear? Let him get out of my workshop, or there will be trouble."

Early next day, Master Dinu went to the workshop and called to Sandu.

He found it difficult, and he much regretted having to part with him, but there was nothing else to be done. He asked him how long he had been in his workshop, what money he had drawn, and made the calculation as to how much he had still to receive.

Sandu felt as if the house were falling about his ears—he could not keep him any longer? The blow was a heavy one.

"You have twenty-seven florins to come to you," said Master Dinu, and he did not seem to have the courage to look Sandu in the face. "Here are thirty, so that you do not lose your daily pay up to the beginning of next week. May God give you good fortune, you are a good man, and an honest,

but I—I can no longer keep you. I am sorry, but I cannot help it. God be with you."

And so saying, Master Dinu went away.

Lost in thought Sandu stood gazing in front of him, seeing nothing. After a while he sighed heavily, picked up his money, and with a heart that seemed turned to ice he went off to collect all he had, poor man, in the way of clothes and linen, before he took the road.

He collected all his possessions, but he could not make up his mind to take leave of the men with whom he had worked so long. Even Iotza was sorry, for Sandu had been kind, and never spoken a rude word to him.

"I am sorry to leave you," said Sandu, and he felt as if his heart was breaking.

"God be with you," replied they, and holding out their hands they accompanied him outside.

Iotza went a little way with him.

"Sandu, listen; I cannot bear not to tell you, but I know the mistress and you, and I know you want to go and say good-bye to her. Don't go, listen to me: it was not the master, it was she who said you were to be dismissed. Don't go, it is better not to go."

Sandu made no reply.

They went a few steps farther together and parted. The nearer he drew to Master Dinu's house, the more he longed to enter. He felt as though some one were urging him to go in.

When he was quite near the door Master Dinu came out into the street. When he saw Sandu he stopped.

"You are going?"

"I am going, master, but I wanted to take leave of the mistress."

"As the mistress is not at home let me tell her."

Sandu bent his head.

"Good luck to you, master.

"May God be with you!"

With slow and heavy step Sandu took the road to the market-place. At the corner he stopped. He turned his head and looked back along the street towards Master Dinu's house.

He had crossed the square and was on the bridge when he met Nitza Burencea.

"What's up, Sandu, have you left? Where are you going?"

Sandu, like a person awakened out of a trance, with his eyes fastened dreamily upon the distant horizon, answered in a troubled voice:

"I go out into the world!"

THE BIRD OF ILL OMEN

By I. Al. Bratescu-Voineshti

CONU COSTACHE had one of the pleasantest faces in the town.

Men of the same age as himself said he was nearly seventy years old ; but a life free from care, a comfortable fortune, a wife as loving as a sister, two children who were getting on well, and, above all, his own kindly nature, had kept him so healthy, quick of movement and clear of mind, that one would not have given him fifty years.

He told stories with a charm and humour that gathered an audience round him whenever he opened his mouth ; and as he had travelled much abroad, and was also a sportsman, he knew every kind of amusing anecdote.

This man, who was as good as new bread, always smiling, whose person seemed to radiate joy, became acrimonious and impatient every time his game of Preference went badly ; it was the one and only, but the daily game of cards he played. He did not get angry out of stinginess—he was not a miser ;

on the contrary, he was open-handed, that was his nature.

If it happened that he "entered" twice in succession, or if he got irritated with his partners, he grew furious. Everything seemed wrong to him; the jam was sour, the coffee too sweet, the water too cold, the lamp too dim, the chalk was not sharp enough; he shouted at the boy who served him; he changed his chair because it squeaked; he hammered upon the table with his fists until the candlesticks jumped; he looked daggers over his spectacles at anyone who made a joke—I assure you, he was in a vile temper, as vile a temper as a man could be in, when he had no other place in which to give vent to it.

His partners knew him, and were aware that five minutes after the game was over he would become once more kind, amiable, and amusing Conu Costache.

If you were sitting near him when he was playing Preference, you should get up the first time he "entered"; shouldn't wait for him to say to you: "Can't you get away, my good fellow; you spoil my luck!" One day, after two "entries," he said to a person with whom he had only just become acquainted and who would not move away from his side:

"Excuse me, sir, but I believe in birds of ill omen. This game is a question of faces. I can scarcely compose my own face; I certainly cannot

compose yours. Kindly move a little farther off! Thank you. Don't be offended."

Ever since that day, the onlookers at the game have been given the name of birds of ill omen, and they swarmed in the room where Conu Costache played; if the game went well he was affable and they listened to him with pleasure—if the game went badly, they moved away from him and made fun of his ill humour.

One evening the Prefect gave a party. The young people danced in the drawing-room; their elders assembled in the other rooms; Conu Costache sat at a table playing Preference with three other people; among them was the attorney, a cunning player with a special talent for making him lose his temper; a large audience had gathered round.

Conu Costache was losing: he was angry, but controlled himself—he could not give vent to his annoyance, for there were ladies present. Conu and his friends were playing in the middle of the room; he had barely scored six, and had entered the pool with thirteen.

At this moment an old lady approached. She was a Moldavian, the mother of Dr. Ionashcu. She took a chair, seated herself by Conu Costache with the calm serenity of the aged, who neither see nor hear well.

There she remained.

From time to time she gently put a question to

Conu Costache; it had the same effect upon his agitation as does oil upon a fire of coals.

"How beautiful it must be at your country-house now, Mr. Costache!"

"Beautiful, Mrs. Raluca," he replied, forcing himself to smile—and chalking himself another eighteen in the pool.

"I expect you often go there, as it is so close."

"I went to-day, Mrs. Raluca."

No words can describe the contrast between the placidity with which Mrs. Raluca told her beads, and the fury with which Conu Costache shuffled his cards.

"Is it a good harvest, Mr. Costache?"

"G—g—good, Mrs. Raluca," he replied, thrusting both hands inside the neck of his shirt to loosen the collar.

The game began, the attorney played below the ace, Conu Costache named the suit for the second time.

"Have you got a good road along there now?"

"Y—y—yes, Mrs. Raluca."

It was a wonder his handkerchief did not rub the skin off his forehead, he mopped it with such vigour. His partners and the onlookers shook with laughter; the attorney did not give way at all, he saw how furious he was; he bid with nothing in his hand, and passed just in time to make him "enter" a second time.

And at this moment Mrs. Raluca's questions

fell one after the other as fast as the beads of a rosary. She did not hear the rustling of the cards nor the choking in Conu Costache's throat, she did not see his misery nor the amusement of the others.

"But they have cut down the lovely wood on the right, haven't they, Mr. Costache?"

"Th—th—they have cut it down, Mrs. Raluca," he answered, gazing at the ceiling and pressing his temples between his hands.

He bid and came in, said "Play"—and found two clubs in the talon which he did not want. Such a collection of cards you have never seen; it might have been done on purpose. If you had tried to arrange them so, you could not have done it. It was a regular "walk-over": one cut four honours, the other cut the spades, and out of the eight games won five.

All he cut was an ace, and a pair. He put forty-eight in the pool.

"But the little lake still lies on the left, doesn't it, Mr. Costache?"

"St—st—still, Mrs. Raluca."

With a small brush he violently effaced the whole row of his stakes chalked on the cloth and wrote down a total of ninety-four in huge figures.

"But I must ask you, the inn——"

Conu Costache turned his chair right round.

"Mrs. Raluca, to-morrow afternoon my wife and I are going to our country-house—we will come and pick you up. In this way you will see

how they cut down the wood on the right; you will see how the storks walk by the lake on the left; you will see how they have repaired the bridges; you will see how they have renovated the inn at the cross-gates; you will see what a nice house Ionitza Andrescu from Ulmi has built; you will see what big reservoirs the Aurora factory have erected by the road. . . ."

Mrs. Raluca understood and took her departure, telling her beads as she went, but even when she had passed into the third room Conu Costache still continued, while the others were convulsed with laughter:

"You will see how illegible the figures on the 76 milestone have become; you will see how the boys have broken the insulators on the telegraph posts by throwing stones at them; you will see how the geese hiss when the carriage passes by; you will see——"

Then, turning back to his partners, who laughed till the tears ran down their cheeks, he groaned:

"Terrible bird of ill omen!"

IRINEL

By B. Delavrancea

WHEN my parents died, both in the same year, I was quite small; I think I must have been about seven years old.

I wanted to cry over them both, for I loved them both, but when I approached their coffin I was not alone.

You must know that my father left a considerable fortune.

There were many people about him who could not endure him.

There was talk of a will.

There was one member of the family about whom my father said: "It is so long since he crossed our threshold that I do not understand why he is so offended with us."

It is unkind to tell you: it was his brother and my uncle, a very good man, with only one fault —he had lost his entire fortune at cards. I found among my father's papers a quantity of his I.O.U.'s, beautifully signed with flourishes, but unpaid.

I approached the coffin ; I was sure that I should weep as no one had ever wept before.

My home without my parents !

Some one took me by the hand, and said to me as he kissed me on both cheeks :

"Iorgu, Iorgu, cry, Iorgu, for those who will never return ! "

It was he ! The uncle of the promissory notes !

Just when my eyes ought to have been full of tears, I caught sight of him, and when I looked round me and saw the other people, when I met so many pairs of eyes, then—I was ashamed and could not cry. Oh, it is a terrible thing to feel ashamed to cry when one is sorrowing !

Do you see how shy I am ? Have you grasped it ? It is difficult to understand. It is difficult, because you, readers, are different. Not one of you are the same as I am.

. . . . .

I was so good and timid that, when I completed my twenty-first year, I did not want to leave the guardianship of my eldest uncle, my mother's brother, a very gentle man like myself, and very shy like my mother.

It makes me laugh. Is it likely I shall tell you an untruth ? Why should I ? I don't ask you anything, you don't ask me anything. Why should I lie ?

But it is true that I have not told you quite openly why I did not ask for an account of my

minority, and why I stayed in that house, which was as white as milk—especially on moonlight nights—with its balcony, its oak staircase, its pillars with flowered capitals and wreaths round their centres.

Did I like the house? Yes.

Did I love my uncle who had managed my affairs? Yes. Was I ashamed, directly I came of age, to demand an account as though I doubted his honesty? Yes. Anything besides? Was there anything else that kept me in bondage?

If you had looked at me a little askance, I should have blushed and replied, "Yes." And if you were to look at me even now when I have already grown many white hairs, I should tell you like a guilty child: "No, it is not true that I loved so much the house in which I grew up, or the uncle with whom I lived. There was something else."

There was some one there besides a cousin of the same age as myself, besides my uncle—my aunt was dead—besides the house, and a long-haired dog. There was somebody else!

Ah! This sort of somebody has reformed many a ne'er-do-weel, has dazzled many a shy man, has turned many business men into poets, has shaken many a professor to the depths of his being, blowing away his system like the threads of a spider's web.

No doubt it was a very fascinating "somebody"

who made you stay in tutelage twenty-four hours after you had reached your twenty-first year and come into 15,000 lei.

I think you have guessed the secret which I have hidden till now.

Oh, women, women! What do they care for the timid or the philosopher?

Neither innocence nor philosophy can resist a light step and a pair of eyes which sparkle and glow and pierce through the coldest, most selfish, most impenetrable heart.

. . . . .

Was it not the same Irinel, with whom I once played childish games? Was she not the same wild tomboy with her frocks down to her knees only, and her white stockings that became green by the evening? Was she not the same little demon who threw her books into the veranda on her return from school, and put both arms round my neck to make me give her a ride on my back?

The child turned into the woman, and instead of the gentle eyes with their extreme innocence in which I lost myself as in a boundless expanse, there shone two devilish fires in whose light I saw an explanation of life with all its sea of pleasures and emotions.

And now Irinel used to take me by the hand. She was fifteen years old; for some time her hand had felt different—warmer, softer, more I don't know what, when I took it in mine. Her gaiety

was no longer even and continual as of old ; she no longer talked quickly and incessantly.

And if I said to her : " Irinel, do you think it will rain to-day ? " or " Irinel, there are only two weeks before the long vacation begins, shall you be pleased, as you used to be, when we go to Slanic ? " Irinel remained silent, looking straight in front of her, and I am sure that at that moment she saw nothing—trees, houses, and sky disappeared as though in a thick mist.

This silence surprised and disquieted me, and I said to her in a low voice, almost as though I were guilty of something wrong :

" Irinel, you are scarcely back from school and you are bored already ? "

An exaggerated gaiety was her immediate reply ; she laughed, and talked, and told little anecdotes which she began and left unfinished, especially about life at school.

" You don't know," she said to me in a quick, loud voice, " what a letter one of my friends showed me. Only I read it, and another girl and her sister, and it seems to me she showed it to some others. I nearly died of laughter."

And Irinel began to laugh, and laughed and laughed until the tears ran down her rosy cheeks. Then sighing and laughing she began :

" He wrote to her, trembling, of stars, two only, which burnt and spoke to him. How can the stars he talks about burn ? Are they bits of coal ? How

can stars speak? I don't understand. After that came ice, thawing, marble, a bed of fire, a monastery, suicide—Ah! pauvre Marie! Indeed, I was sorry for her, poor girl! Many a time we put our arms round each other's necks and kissed each other. We kissed each other and began to cry. You must know, Iorgu, that we kept nothing from each other. Every Monday she read me a letter on which could be seen traces of big tears, and I, after I had controlled myself sufficiently not to burst out laughing over those 'two twin stars which burn and speak,' had to prepare to cry, and, believe me, I cried with all my heart. *Pauvre chérie!*"

Irinel was ready to cry after laughing with such enjoyment, but, when she noticed that I kept my eyes cast down and listened in silence as though I were offended, she asked me with malicious irony:

"Iorgu, do you think it will rain to-day?"

Such scenes took place early in the morning: Sunday was a day of torture for me. All day Irinel said "If you please" to me. She embroidered or played the piano instead of our walking about the yard and garden. All day I felt the terrible anger of a very shy person with "those two stars which speak."

For three years I lived this life of daring dreams during the week, of fear and misery on Sunday, of wonderful plans put off from day to day, and concealed with an hypocrisy possessed only by the timid and innocent.

During the last year, after a vacation passed at Slanic, I made up my mind.

The day she went back to school we hardly dared kiss each other. What cold kisses! We neither of us looked at the other. I remember I looked at the sofa, and it seemed to me as though my lips had touched the hard yellow material instead of those firm, rosy cheeks which were to me a fearful joy.

I made up my mind, and I am sure that no one could have come to a more heroic decision.

To give myself courage, during the first night I thought out the scene which should take place the following Sunday without fail. I did not sleep all night; in the intense darkness I saw the garden, I saw Irinel, I heard myself, I heard her.

. . . . .

The cocks crew. I was lying at full length, my face uppermost, my eyes shut. I was perspiring from the boldness which I had shown during the scene which was running in my mind.

"Irinel, will you come and walk in the garden?"

"No, *merci!*"

"That will not do, we must go for a walk."

She understood that I had decided to say something important to her. Such courage impressed and compelled.

The cocks crew. It was midnight. It was pouring; flashes of lightning, like serpents of light, shone for a second through my curtains.

"Irinel, you must come with me. Don't you see what a beautiful day it is? I have discovered a bunch of ripe grapes which I have kept for you all the week."

"No, *merci!*"

"It is impossible for you not to come. I have made up my mind to tell you something——"

"What?" replied Irinel, and turned her eyes upon me."

Who could bear such a bright light? I looked down, but revolted by such cowardice I felt the courage of a hero, and lifting my head I replied to her:

"You must come!"

In all my life I had never commanded anyone. I was ordering her!

It was pitch dark; it was raining outside. I turned towards the wall. I closed my eyes. It was light. It was a beautiful Sunday. And still full of that courage I said to her once more:

"You must come!"

And I took her by the hand. From now on my heart almost ceased to beat. I told her all I had wanted to say to her for two years.

"Irinel, Irinel, I love you! Do you love me? Why are you silent? Why do you look down? Tell me, shall I leave the house where I have watched you growing up under my eyes, or——"

"Stay!"

We embraced each other ; we kissed each other. It was over.

Lord ! How brave men are when they are in love !

I grew cold all over when I reflected that this scene had not yet taken place, but was still to come. I sank down under my quilt afraid of such courage.

It began to grow light. I went off to sleep gradually, rehearsing this heroic scene :

"Irinel, will you come for a walk ?"

"No, *merci !*"

"This cannot be, you must—— "

. . . . .

The next day I woke up about ten o'clock. My uncle asked me in his kind, calm voice :

"Iorgu, are you not well that you got up so late to-day ?"

I, feeling myself in fault, replied, embarrassed :

"No—a book—I went to sleep late."

My ears were burning as though I had held them against a hot stove.

The veranda seemed to be giving way under me. Do you know, at that moment a thought crossed my mind that overwhelmed me ? Irinel was only Irinel, but, with my uncle, what courage I should need ! How would he, an old man of pious habits, regard in his old age a marriage within the prohibited degree among members of his own family ?

Why did he stand in front of me ? Why did

he look at me like that? He understood me and was appraising me! His look spoke, though his lips most certainly did not move. I heard the words passing through his mind as distinctly as though some one had whispered in my ear:

"I never could have believed, nephew, that you would have turned my child's head! What would your mother say were she alive to see this?"

Why did not my uncle turn away from me? Was he looking at me or elsewhere? What else was there to see? I do not know if the fault was great, but the judge was cruel. And my judge grew bigger, like a Titan, like a wall between me and Irinel. In my ears there rang what I am convinced was the sentence he had secretly passed on me: "What a depraved youth! The old are passing away, and with them disappear the old moral ideas!"

I was ready to sink under my chair. My uncle said to me:

"Iorgu, you have not had any coffee. It seems to me you are not well, are you?"

What irony! Were his words more gentle than before? Useless thought! I understood him. God defend you from a good man who disapproves of you. It's bad enough to feel oneself guilty before a good and upright man.

Why was punishment for mankind invented? Punishment is the reward of sin. I could have wished that my uncle would pronounce his sentence

of punishment But no, he has taken me prisoner, he has judged me and, instead of punishing me, he stoops to give me coffee and two rolls. In all my life I had never experienced a greater agony.

No doubt he had seen us walking silently together, not gaily as we used to do. He understood why Irinel stayed in the house on one or two Sundays. Of course he knew why I did not go to sleep till early dawn, and who knows, he might have heard me calling in my dreams :

"Irinel, Irinel, I love you ! Do you love me ?"

What would my uncle think of his daughter married to his sister's son ? It would mean asking for a dispensation. Would it not be turning such a religious man into an object of derision in his old age ? And for what reason ? Just through the caprice of a boy whom he had brought up and cared for.

Irinel and I had grown up together more like brother and sister than cousins ! If there had only been a question of the civil right ! But the laws of the Church ! How could one trample them underfoot ?

Throughout the week, early in the morning, at night and through the day, at meals and during school hours, this thought occupied my mind !

"It is impossible ! It is impossible ! I wonder that I did not see that sooner."

. . . . .

About six o'clock on Saturday our old carriage

turned into the courtyard ; inside was my uncle and by him sat Irinel. From the oak steps of the veranda I watched the white hair and the golden curls and, scarcely able to control my tears, I said to myself: "It is impossible."

Irinel sprang from the carriage and came up to me. She was happy. We kissed each other, but, believe me, she seemed to kiss in the air.

"What's the matter, Iorgu? You are very pale. You are thinner, or does it only seem so to me?"

Before I could answer her my uncle hastened, *hastened* to say :

"I don't know what's the matter with Iorgu. It seems to me he is ill, but he will not say so."

Oh! Oh! You don't know what is the matter with me, uncle? You don't know what is the matter? It seems to you I am ill? I do not want to tell you? Do you say what is the matter with you? You are a good man, but what a hypocrite——

He thinks I do not understand him.

To Irinel I say gently :

"There is nothing the matter, Irinel. But you, are you well?"

And so it went on—nearly a whole year of depression.

Why should I tell you that I grew thinner and paler, that I often shivered, and with secret pleasure, exaggerated a little cough when I walked in the

garden with Irinel? You have seen so many thin and pale men, and you have read so many novels in which consumptive lovers either shoot themselves or throw themselves into the sea, so that if I told you that I grew thinner, that I took to playing billiards, that I began to drink, and that once I drank three half bottles in succession, you would only yawn.

There is nothing remarkable in the love and depression of a nervous person. Who would remain, even for an instant, with a man who suffers in silence? And I kept silence from St. Mary's day to St. Peter's.

"What is the matter with you?"

"Nothing."

"Are you ill?"

"No, uncle; no, dear Irinel."

At last the momentous day arrived! Irinel finished the last year of her education. On the 20th of June she left school for good.

That very day she asked my uncle abruptly to what watering-place we were going, and on hearing came into my room.

Stretched upon my bed, I was reading the wonderful discourse of Cogalniceanu's, printed in front of the "Chronicles." I made up my mind to read law and study literature and history.

When I saw her I jumped up. She whirled round on one foot, and her gown seemed like a big convolvulus; and after this revolution she stopped in front of me, laughing and clapping her hands.

She made me a curtsy as she daintily lifted up her skirt on either side between two fingers, and asked me coyly :

" Mon cher cousin, can you guess where we are going to this summer ? "

" No, Irinel," I replied, exaggerating the cough which was becoming more and more of a silly habit.

" What will you give me if I tell you ? "

And after once more whirling round while her gown swept across my feet, and laughing and clapping, she asked me most sedately :

" Will you kiss my hand with respect, like a grown-up person's, if I tell you ? "

" Yes, Irinel."

And the cough again played its part.

" No, you must kiss my hand first."

She held out her hand to me, which I kissed sadly, but with pleasure.

" And now this one ! "

" And that one, Irinel."

" To Mehadia ! To Mehadia ! Won't it be beautiful ? I am bored with Slanic."

She ran about the house so quickly that her petticoats worked up above her knees. I blushed ; she blushed ; then breaking into a silvery laugh she threw herself upon me and said :

" We will dance a polka. I will sing. I will be gentleman ; I will steer you."

Then I heard my uncle calling her : " Irinel ! Irinel ! Where are you ? "

She disappeared in a second.

I threw myself on my bed. I took up the "Chronicles," but instead of reading I began to think. "Irinel! Irinel!" The first Irinel was quick, severe, malicious, the second one was lingering, much softer, almost caressing. Of course he had meant to reassure her, he had wanted to deceive me. He thought to make me believe he had meant nothing. But what did that "*Where* are you?" signify?

I understood from the way in which he had said "*where*" that there lay the real drift of the question. He had not anything to say to her, but he very much wanted to know "*where*" she was. In other words, was she perchance with me in my room? Such espionage was humiliating for an orphan whose whole life he had directed, and whose fortune he had controlled, because he had the right to say to him with a single word, by a single look: "This is how I reward an ungrateful person, a youth who has no regard for the old men who are soon to pass away, burying with them the moral customs of this country." That "Where are you?" was as clear as noonday. Do you suppose he did not know where she was?

"Ah! An orphan must not fall in love!"

I don't know what other thoughts I had. The door of the room opened; Irinel stood in the doorway.

How great an unhappiness it is to see happiness

standing on the threshold, and to know it will not cross ; that it will remain yonder, so near and yet so far !

Irinel crossed the threshold ; she came up to me. I realized that she had crossed the threshold, but still my happiness remained outside. I understood the old man had sent her back in order to deceive me, and that she had guessed nothing.

"Do you know what Father has just told me ? A guest is coming to us at the festival of St. Peter. A big merchant."

What did that mean ?

"And did he say anything else ? "

"Nothing ; but yes, he did. We are to kill our fattest chicken and the house is to be put into the most spick and span order, for our guest is an important merchant, a deputy, elderly, and I don't know what all and what else."

After teasing me and laughing at me because I coughed just as the girls at school did to make the doctor prescribe iron and old wine, but more particularly old wine than iron, Irinel left me.

"Ugh ! It's lucky he is old. Supposing he had been a young man ? "

. . . . .

On St. Peter's day I rose in such a state of anxiety that I started at every sound. Has it not been known for old men to lose their heads and marry girls of eighteen ?

For three hours I wandered about the grounds.

I waited for this rival with the same impatience with which I once waited for Irinel to come quickly from school. Am I deceiving myself or not? The same sensations, identically the same, were present with me, waiting thus for the object of my hatred as when I waited for her I loved. I wanted to see him as soon as possible; for a second; just to know him; to find out who he was.

At ten o'clock a carriage drew up in front of the door. Some one got out. When I saw him I began to laugh. He was very feeble, he was very old. No doubt he was smart with his black coat and red tie. I greeted him with respect, I might almost say with affection, and then, sorry at having felt hatred for such an old man, with such snow-white hair, I went quietly into the garden. I turned down one of the paths. How sad and drear do the most beautiful natural surroundings become when they are reflected by a sad and lonely heart? What indifference everywhere!

The garden gate was opened rather hastily as though the wind had forced it. Irinel appeared. She looked all round, then, seeing me, she flew towards me. The breeze which she made by her flight fluttered her thin gown of white batiste with black spots.

She was pale. She took my hand. Her own trembled. She tried to speak, and said several times:

"Wait, wait, wait while I get my breath——"

Then she became silent and looked at me. Oh, what a look! Her eyes flashed sparks. Their blue depths seemed to me like an incomprehensible ocean, tempest driven, without bottom, without boundaries. I looked down, overwhelmed by an inexplicable fear, by a powerful emotion. I noticed my boots, and I thought to myself: "Have they cleaned my boots to-day or not? Of course, they must have. Don't they clean them every day?"

"Iorgu, do you know why that old man has come?"

"No," I answered her, with a stupid calm.

Had they cleaned my boots? Perhaps the dew was still on the grass.

"Iorgu, do you know what Father said to me?"

"No."

"'Put on your foulard gown.'"

"Your foulard gown? The one I like so much?"

"But do you know why he wanted me to?"

"Of course I do."

She trembled.

I continued, as I took out my handkerchief and flicked the dust from one of my boots:

"Of course I know. Isn't to-day a great festival?"

"Ah," she replied as she withdrew the hand I was holding, "you understand nothing! What an indifferent and non-understanding man you are!"

Indifferent? I understood everything from her look and her emotion, and with a calmness which I was certainly far from feeling I bent down and dusted the other boot.

"The old man has come, Irinel——" I said, glancing at her for a moment.

She was white, her lower lip quivered, the light in her eyes had darkened.

"The old man has come, Irinel. What then? He will dine with us? All the better. We shall be a bigger party at table."

Was it I speaking? There were only she and I in the garden.

"The old man has come, has come. Alas!" she replied, covering her eyes with both her hands. "The old man has come and some one is going to leave this house! He has——"

Irinel began to cry.

"What has he?"

"A son who is an engineer."

"Engineer? Has he learnt engineering?"

"Yes, *he has learnt engineering!*" Irinel replied angrily, and uncovered her crimson cheeks. "Yes, he has learnt en-gi-neer-ing, and some one is going to leave this house!"

I watched how she stood in the doorway, and then crossed it lightly as she wiped away her tears on a clean corner of her gown. I looked long after her, then I threw myself face upwards under one of the fruit-trees.

Nature was full of life! The apple-trees bent their great boughs; the sparrows chattered, some of them were fluttering their wings, others were collecting into groups preparing for a fierce fight. Little patches of sunlight played upon my face. When I felt two rows of tears trickling into my ears, I jumped to my feet, I gazed towards the door, and said gently, full of a profound melancholy:

"Some one is going to leave this house!"

. . . . .

The next day I showed my uncle a faked recommendation, in writing, from a doctor ordering me to Bourboule under pretext of a serious affection of the left lung.

I pass rapidly over this episode. I kissed my uncle's hand and Irinel. Irinel!

Only when I was crossing the frontier and looking from the open window of the train at the Hungarian landscape lying stretched out before me, did I begin to wonder. Supposing she had not looked at me so intently! A searching look paralysed me. Supposing she had asked me what it was I wanted to say to her? Such shyness is a form of madness. But what courage I should have wanted! How could I have convinced my uncle? Was not Irinel like my sister? Ah, no! It was impossible! It was impossible!

The train, which was puffing along, gave a whistle that echoed through the country. A few tears fell through the window, and seeking with my

eyes the country from which I had come, and the direction where lay the house and garden in which I had grown up so happily, I gave a wave with my hand, and said sighing :

" Good-bye, Irinel ! "

THE END

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